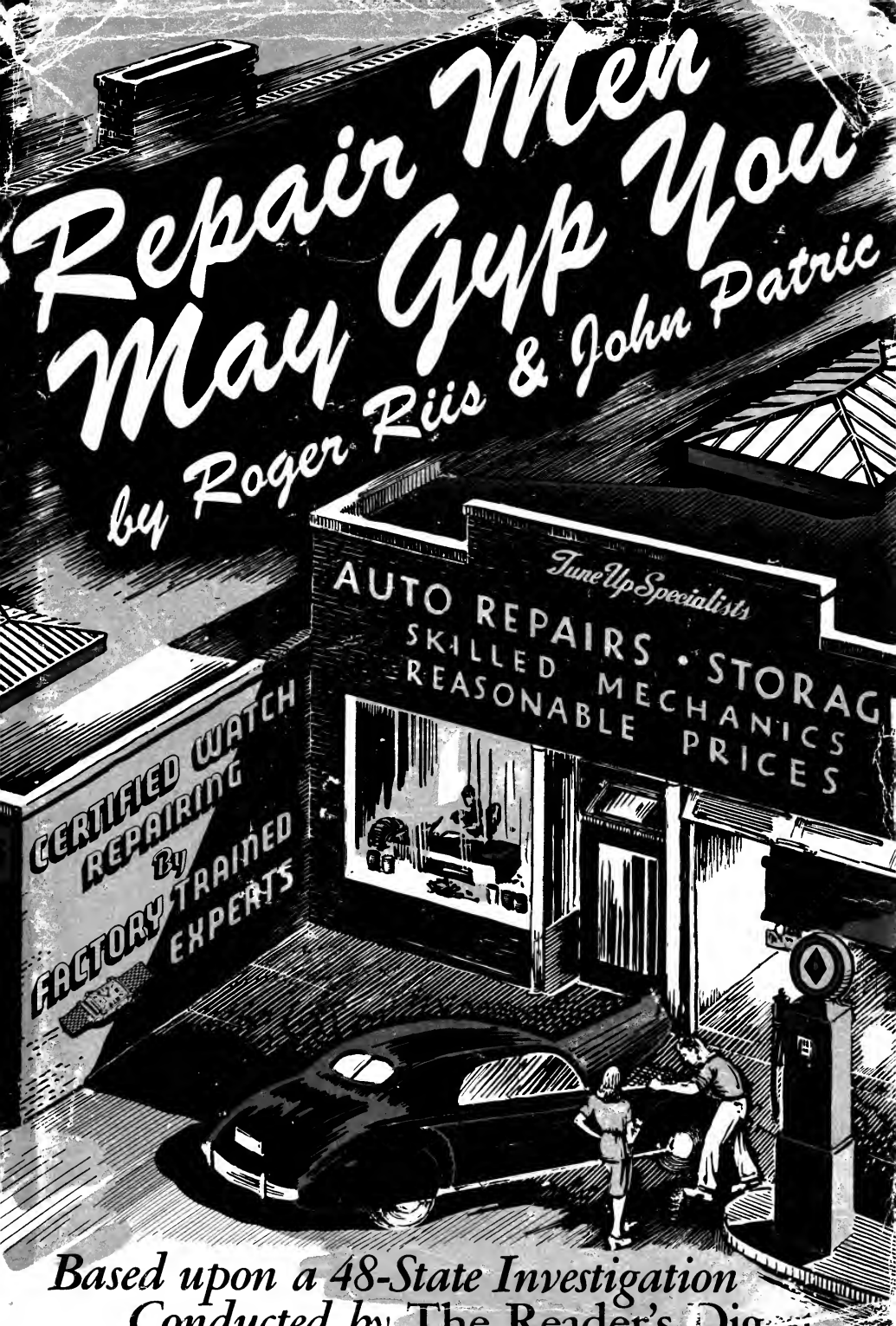
Repair Men May Gyp You

by Roger Riis & John Patric



Based upon a 48-State Investigation
Conducted by The Reader's Digest

Illustrated by Ralph Clark

Repairmen May Gyp You

By ROGER RIIS and JOHN PATRIC

"For six months," says *The New York Herald Tribune,* "the two authors of this perturbing little volume made a nationwide investigation of the higher nature, if any, of the American repairman. Buying a used car of distinguished make, they engaged the assistance of a lady who looked more helpless than she was, and traveled 19,000 miles, with 1,700 calls on repair shops."

"And no one," adds the *Boston Post,* "could ever pass this book with indifference. Whatever your experience with repairmen may have been, you'll find its counterpart here. You will point it out with great satisfaction, and you'll say: 'There! That's exactly what happened to me once.' And you're lucky if it has happened only once. The *Post* can't think of any subject for research that touches more people. Buy this book, and you will get your money back, over and over, in amounts saved through your wisdom."

"There are some amusing stories in it," says the *Baltimore Sun,* and the *Washington Post* thinks that the funniest were "the authors' experiences with the Rube Goldberg testing machines used by some shops to impress customers."

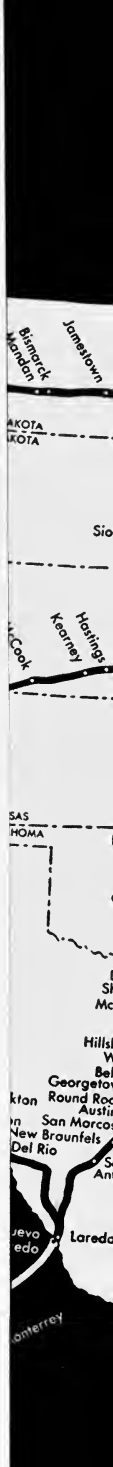
"The articles in *The Reader's Digest* were interesting," remarks the *Springfield Republican,* "but they left room for doubt. The book, however, with details of the almost laboratory caution used by the authors in making their tests, is alarmingly convincing."

"Before you start on an automobile trip," cautioned the magazine *Holiday* seven years after this book first appeared, "take the advice of Riis and Patric. The mechanics haven't improved since they wrote REPAIRMEN MAY GYP YOU." "It ought to help people avoid unnecessary expense," adds the *Newark News,* for, declares the *Waterbury American,* "this is authentic testimony." "It will help promote the longevity," believes the *Boston Globe,* "of readers' watches, radios, cars, and typewriters."

This survey was considered important enough by dozens of American newspapers to warrant *editorial* comment such as few books ever receive. Typical was this—a part of an editorial in *The New York Times*—"It performs a real service for motorists." "By calling attention to the tricks employed," adds the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* "it should help to alert the public and discourage cheats."

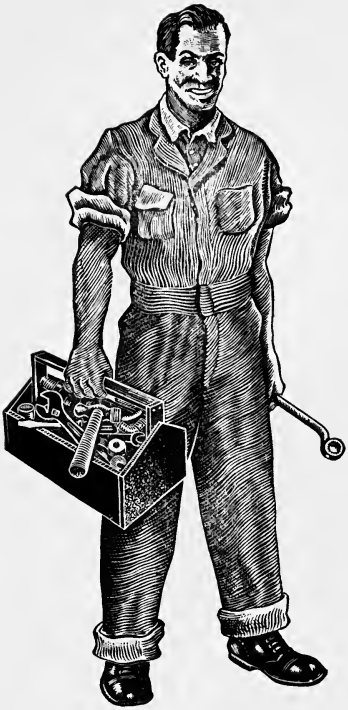
This book is printed from the plates of the first edition, with new front matter, 30 illustrations, a new jacket, and a far finer, more durable binding.

For press comments about another book by one of the authors of this one, see the *inside* of this jacket, the part that lies against the book and is usually left blank.




"The Routes of the Expedition"
Ralph Clark's Map of a 19,000 Mile Journey—for Reader's Digest—into Every State, and 1,700 Repair Shops
MINNESOTA
Northead
New York Mills
Motley
Browerville
Little Falls
St. Cloud
Elk River
Wadena
Minneapolis
Faribault
Owatonna
Albert Lea
WISCONSIN
St. Paul
Rochester
La Crosse
Tomah
Wisconsin Dells
Milwaukee
Waukesha
MICHIGAN
Muskegon
Holland
Somerset
Coldwater
Detroit
Dearborn
Ypsilanti
IOWA
Austin
Jewell
Ames
Urbandale
Wiota
Prosper
Pottsville
McGregor
Fennimore
Dubuque
Decorah
Madison
Freeport
Elgin
Rockford
Chicago
Mendota
LaSalle
Tonica
Des Moines
Council Bluffs
Nebraska City
Auburn
Sobetha
Topeka
Waverly
Independence
Coffeyville
Bartles-ville
Tulsa
Sapulpa
Okmulgee
Durant
Denison
Sherman
McKinney
Dallas
Bloomington
Lincoln
Springfield
Staunton
St. Louis
Murphysboro
Carbondale
Cobden
Makanda
Vienna
Cairo
Paducah
Sikeston
ILLINOIS
INDIANA
ARKANSAS
MISSOURI
KENTUCKY
TENNESSEE
Blytheville
Turrell
Memphis
Love
West
Jackson
Beauregard
McComb
Hammond
New Orleans
MISSISSIPPI
ALABAMA
GEORGIA
LOUISIANA
Senatobia
Sardis
Pope
Grenada
Winona
Goodman
Pickens
Canton
Gulfport
Biloxi
Pass Christian
Mobile
Brewton
Andalusia
Opp
Samson
Dothan
Donalsonville
Bainbridge
FLORIDA
Tallahassee
Jacksonville
St. Augustine
Palatka
De Land
Orlando
Tampa
St. Pete
Stuart
Ft Myers
Naples
Miami
Key West
Gary
Mich City
Niles
Monroe
Toledo
Fremont
Sandusky
Cleveland
Akron
Canton
Pittsburgh
Lafayette
Logansport
Peru
Richmond
Springfield
Columbus
Zanesville
Cambridge
Wheeling
OHIO
WEST VIRGINIA
PENNSYLVANIA
Harrisburg
Wilmington
Baltimore
Bureaucratsburg
VIRGINIA
Richmond
Clarksville
South Hill
South Boston
Portsmouth
Norfolk
Suffolk
Durham
Danville
Reidsville
Greensboro
Lexington
Salisbury
Charlotte
N.C.
SOUTH CAROLINA
Chapel Hill
Raleigh
Rocky Mount
Chester
Winnsboro
Columbia
Sumter
Charleston
Savannah
Darien
Brunswick
Buffalo
Rochester
Geneva
Auburn
Syracuse
Oneida
Utica
Schenectady
Albany
Troy
Pleasantville
Port Jervis
New York
Clifton
Easton
Trenton
Philadelphia
Huntingdon
Altoona
Erie
Fairville
Pittsburgh
NEW YORK
Rutland
VT.
Portland
Biddeford
Sanford
Concord
N. H.
Portsmouth
Newburyport
Pittsfield
Boston
MASS.
Springfield
Providence
Danbury
Hartford
Salis-bury
N. J.
DEL.
MD

To Bill & Si Jarrett
may your repairmen
be truthful!
[illegible]
5.27.55



"No matter what your experience with repairmen may have been, you'll find its counterpart here. You will point it out with great satisfaction and say: 'See! That's just what happened to me!' "

—*The Boston Post*

Acknowledgments

First, to Lioy May, that "good old horse'n wagon," who worked so hard on these surveys. Next, to Robert Littell and William Cragin Lewis, whose intelligent editorial discrimination helped reduce some 1,900 case histories, hundreds of newspaper stories and thousands of readers' letters to the compass of this book.

To Charles Huckins of Hux Cuts, and to Henry R. Diamond for the fine dust jacket drawings, and to Post Photoengraving Co., especially photographer Phil Gordon, and etcher Bill Lambert.

To Bill Riis, for letting me redesign and republish.

To Sol Cantor and his fine crew at The Composing Room, Inc., for new typesetting—and to Louie Bloom of Berkeley for more of the same, but mostly for the loan of a linotype machine to the author, who set most of these lines himself. And for still more bits of special type setting, to Wallace Kibbee and L. F. Deckard.

To tough old Doubleday, who, to avoid *more* trouble with Patric, sold the plates of the unillustrated first edition, from which the *text*—not the front matter nor the final pages—was printed, at salvage prices. To Steve Johnson and Kingsport Press, for new electros.

To Ralph Clark, without whose painstaking artistic craftsmanship I should never have attempted this new edition. All the drawings here are his except for a few American Typefounders' ornaments, and some illustrations taken from the jacket drawing.

To Eddie Boland and to Bud Whitaker, of The Berkeley Engraving Company, for many of the photoengravings used in this edition.

To Moore's Truck Terminal, and Johnson-Hilliard, for invaluable trailer-parking privileges—making possible an office-on-the-job. To The Alling & Cory Company, paper merchants, for many a kindness.

To Angelo Albanese, Henry Dodson, Joe Brancaccio, Phil Tamburino of Russo's in New York, for many a useful photostat. To patient Phil Kirchner, for the drawings from which Becker Bros. made the cover stamping dies.

To the entire staff of Kingsport Press in Kingsport, Tennessee, for the fine job of book manufacture they have promised.

FRYING PAN CREEK
Florence, Oregon

John Patric

Books by John Patric

SIMON LEGREE'S BOOK
—a compilation of amiable hoaxes and of humor columns, from *The Daily Texan*

GEOGRAPHIC JOURNEYS
—bound collection of illustrated articles on The United States, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Italy, Spain, Japan, etc., from *The National Geographic Magazine,* in a limited edition

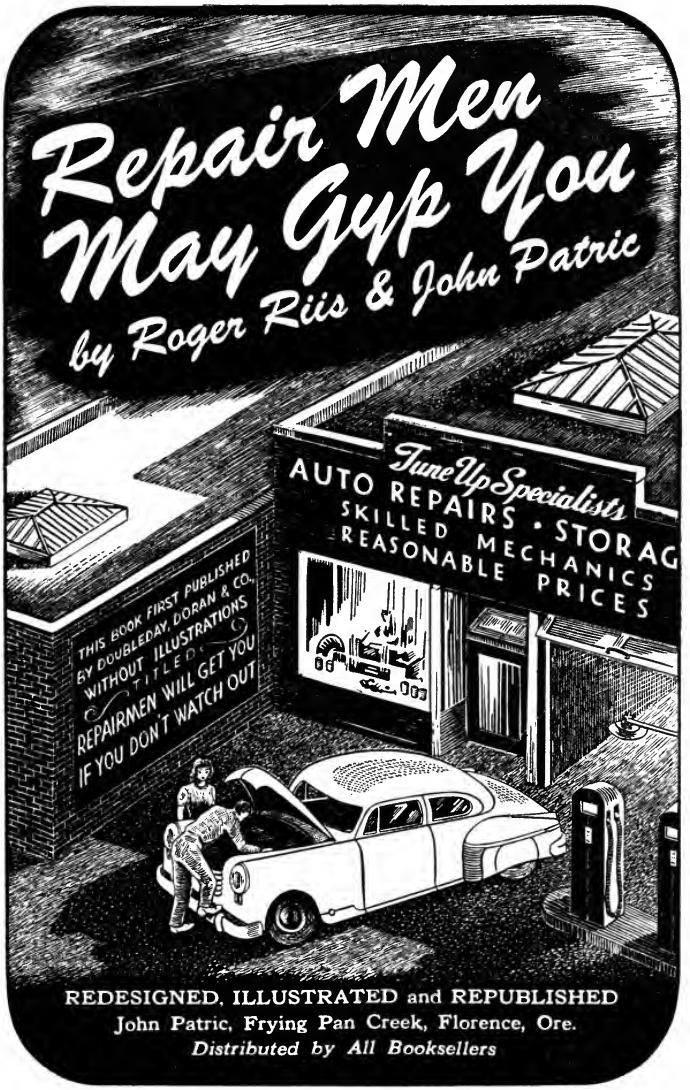
FOR AUNTIE'S SAKE
—a MS play, produced several times by *The Carolina Playmakers*

REPAIRMEN MAY GYP YOU
—(with Roger William Riis) : the famed *Reader's Digest* survey of watch, radio, automobile repairmen—the *whole* story

YANKEE HOBO IN THE ORIENT
—a journal of adventure in China, Japan, Korea and Manchuria, uniformly bound with *Repairmen May Gyp You*

HOBO YEARS
—now in preparation: a tale of boyhood journeys in the United States, uniform with *Yankee Hobo in the Orient*

Roger William Riis, son of the late, great Jacob Riis, author of the classic *Making of an American,* is a prolific magazine writer whose articles appear regularly in national magazines. He is currently a roving editor of *The Reader's Digest.*



REDESIGNED, ILLUSTRATED and REPUBLISHED

John Patric, Frying Pan Creek, Florence, Ore.

Distributed by All Booksellers

This has been one of the most widely discussed journalistic projects ever undertaken. Parts of the book were first printed in *The Reader's Digest* in a series of articles titled *The Repair Man Will Gyp You If You Don't Watch Out; The Radio Repair Man Will Gyp You If You Don't Watch Out; The Watch Repair Man Will Gyp You If You Don't Look Out,* and a fourth article that summarized the tremendous reader reaction. Millions of reprints have been distributed. Excerpts have appeared in newspapers and trade journals everywhere. Parts of this book have been reprinted in Canada and in Great Britain, and in translation, in many other parts of the world, notably Latin America.

Radio dramatizations of some of this material have been presented over national broadcasting networks in both the United States and Canada.

SECOND EDITION

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The words "certified" and "guaranteed," in watchmakers' ads, mean nothing whatever. Nor do his memberships in the trade or "horological" associations protect the customer. *Page 184*

Watch and clock repair shops need no swank. *Facing page 184*

Of 150 average, run-of-the-street typewriter shops tested, two-thirds gypped either the customer *or the typewriter,* or both. Incompetence and carelessness were usual. *Facing page 185*

Most of the typewriter men left the machines in worse shape than they found them. The investigators' typewriters were soon virtually wrecked by inept "mechanics." *Page 185*

Donald Duck takes our advice about itemized bills and old parts. His bill is two feet long. Junk fills his car. *Page 203*

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At *Reader's Digest,* Mary Steyn, of Editorial Correspondence, begins to hear from the more articulate repairmen. *Page 210*

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Famous jewelry names outcharged the little fellows, in spite of their eloquent claims of "dependability." *Page 242*

"The male investigator and his female secretary" are pictured in a most uncomplimentary way by *Motor Age.* *Page 243*

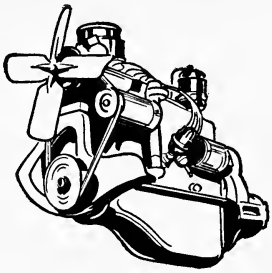
Riis and Patric are subjects of "$1000.00 Reward." *Page 250*

We had already found that eye doctors often lied. Among them, Riis had found many unethical operators. *Page 261*

"More garagemen starve to death than customers." *Page 267*

Caspar Milquetoast finds an honest mechanic *this* time, but, as Cartoonist Webster tells us: "he doesn't always." *Page 271*

To DeWitt Wallace
whose breadth of interest and militant fairness
have so often and so well served
the American people.



Illustrated by Ralph Clark
Clifton, New Jersey

1 *Introduction*

One dark Saturday evening not long ago, a well-travelled coupe pulled into a small New Jersey gas station—the kind of country place where the owner-operator lives on the premises.

"Ten gallons, please," said the motorist.

The service station operator—in this case a white-haired man of friendly dignity and courtesy—went through the usual motions. His pump whirred busily; its gallonage dial went around until it reached the figure "10."

Then the motorist paid and drove away.

It had been a thoroughly routine affair.

Automobile drivers buy gas millions of times a day. *This* time, however, there was a difference.

After the motorist had driven a mile or so down the road, he glanced idly at his gas gauge.

It read "EMPTY."

That had been its reading before the purchase of the ten gallons a few minutes earlier.

Perhaps, the driver thought, his gauge had broken. He stopped to investigate. He tried in vain to get a stick past the curve in the gooseneck of the tank. Finally he decided to return to the gas station and consult. Maybe that pump had not worked.

The old man was obviously upset at the possibility that his pump had delivered no gas.

"I wouldn't have had that happen," he protested. "I don't understand it. It never happened to me before. The pump acted all right. I'm sure you got the gas. Let's figure how to reach in there and find out."

But the motorist had another idea.

"This is a 20-gallon tank," he said. "Put in gas until it runs over; then from twenty we subtract the number of gallons it takes. That way we find out how many gallons are in it now."

So they pumped until gas splashed over, and it took nineteen gallons. The gas station man was genuinely apologetic, and if a human face reliably registers, he had been honest. He was reluctant to accept any money for *any* of the gas. As the motorist drove away, the old man walked back into his home, shaking his head, seeming to mumble uncertainly to himself.

That night, in Atlantic City, the same driver

turned his car over to the hotel porter for delivery to the hotel garage for storage. In the morning he went himself to get it.

On the bill was an item of $2.50.

"What's that for?" the driver asked.

The attendant consulted some records.

"You had a flat tire. We fixed it," he replied.

"I didn't have any flat tire when I drove in here."

"No," replied the attendant. "It went flat during the night sometime."

So the motorist paid and started homeward.

On the way, the incident of the high-priced nocturnal flat tire and the deceptive gas pump came together in his mind, and a more or less idle thought was born:

"I wonder whether both those cases were on the level, or whether both were deliberate gyps?"

Perhaps the gas man was honest; perhaps the Atlantic City garage was not. That was the way it had seemed. How would it run throughout a motorist's experience? Some service men were O.K. Some were not.

"What would the actual percentage be? Wouldn't it be interesting to take a car and visit ten or twenty stations for some identical service, and see how they performed?"

With these thoughts, there was born an idea that grew into a nationwide survey of repairmen here recorded. The motorist was Roger William Riis, coauthor of this book. He had previously made investigations for *The Reader's Digest,* and the following

week he casually mentioned the vague idea to DeWitt Wallace, founder and editor of that magazine.

Mr. Wallace caught the suggestion instantly, and with the judgment that made him the ablest editor of our time, he enlarged upon it.

"It's got great possibilities," he said. "Let's get at it right away. I know a fellow who can help you."

At this point, John Patric came into the story. He had owned 23 different cars, most of them jalopies he fixed himself. But he had driven new cars, too, that others had serviced, and he remembered like incidents: In a Sacramento storage garage *he* once had found on his windshield a bill for $5.50 for a new upper radiator hose, and had been told that "it must have sprung a leak just about the time you drove in, because it was pouring water all over our floor. Of course we knew you'd want it fixed before you ruined your motor."

Another time, Patric recalled, he had been checking over some bills from a Seattle garage that for three months had regularly serviced his car, and had found that each time that car was lubricated, he had been charged for a pound of transmission grease—a total of ten pounds in not more than that many weeks, allegedly pumped into a transmission and rear end that did not leak!

Yet, Patric insisted, these were exceptions. Garage men would be found to be "95 per cent honest—just wait and see!"

Though our critics later charged that we had deliberately set out to find gyps (one garageman

charged that the whole affair had been "conceived in iniquity and born in sin"), such was not the case.

While it was true that acts of servicemen themselves are responsible for this book by making us wonder what the percentage of honesty would be, none of us at any time foresaw the way our survey would turn out.

We were interested only in a journalistically foolproof job, and nothing more.

Obviously, as we often remarked, it would make a good story whatever we found. If the repairmen proved to be virtually 100% honest, that would make fine, heartwarming reading for their fellow Americans. If, on the other hand, they proved to be nearly 100% crooked, that also would be an interesting—if alarming—story. And any intermediate percentage would be equally good.

Wallace and Riis believed that Patric should cover at least "seven or eight states—enough to get a good cross-section." But Patric had other ideas. Without discussing his plans in detail with either his colleague or his editor—lest they be vetoed—he hoped to include in his survey every state in the Union, and Mexico and Canada. Editorial deadlines didn't allow a Canadian check, but a great Canadian newspaper made one for us, with results identical to ours.

Too, Patric wanted to spot-check mechanics in the largest possible number of towns and cities. Ten different checks in five different towns would be more interesting, he reasoned, than ten in one town.

Riis suspected that if we were to find gyppery

commonplace, it was likely that women, because of their more limited knowledge of mechanics, would be gypped more often and more flagrantly than men. It was to test this theory that Patric hired Miss Lioy May, who, dressed simply and inexpensively, looked and acted the part of an ordinary American housewife in modest circumstances who couldn't afford to be gypped.

One day, as the beginning of the actual survey drew near, Wallace and Patric were driving together from Pleasantville to New York. Patric had explained to his editor the simplicity of each minor maladjustment—the loose wire, belt, or tube—that would be the basis of each test, and how simply, easily and quickly an honest mechanic could correct it even without tools.

"What percentage will make some kind of charge, do you think?"

"No more than half, Wally—maybe even fewer."

Wallace rode in silence awhile. Then he said:

"Pat, can't we pay *all of them?*"

"It won't take any of them more than a minute or so to put our equipment back into fine running order—and they'll all see immediately what's wrong."

"That's not my point," Wallace replied. "We'll be paying whatever the crooks care to charge us, and paying many honest men nothing. It isn't fair," he continued, frowning.

"But, Wally," Patric protested again, "there'll be some men who simply *won't* accept anything for the slight and quick adjustment they'll have to make."

"Well, it's up to you to find a way to induce all of them to accept something," Wallace replied, with finality. "Otherwise, though we take but a few minutes of time from each honest man we encounter, we will in the aggregate take days of their time without recompense. I won't do it."

It was Patric's turn, now, to drive in silence down the parkway, thinking, and sometimes thinking aloud.

"They might smell a survey if I insisted too hard," he said. "I suppose I could send each one an anonymous dollar. But that would cost Reader's Digest many hundreds of dollars."

"So what?"

"Well, so—so all right, I guess," replied Patric, still thinking. "Say, Wally——!

"Let's wait until the survey is over and the stories published in the magazine. Then let's write a grateful letter to each honest guy—whether he makes a charge or not—and send him a complimentary subscription to *The Reader's Digest.*"

"Swell!" said Wally.

"I'll bet," he added, "all of 'em'll renew it!"

How many actually *did* renew, the authors of this book do not know. But we found that a surprising number were already subscribers, and merely had their subscriptions extended thereby.

We know, too, that there were repercussions both heartening and sad. Some honest mechanics were promoted—with pay raises—by honest bosses.

At the Mayflower Garage in Los Angeles at mail-time one morning the boss hurried out on the service

floor, beaming, with a letter in his hand signed "DeWitt Wallace." He gave our mechanic the day off. The mechanic happily went out to the beach for the first time in years, passed the honesty-earned holiday lolling in warm sands beneath a sunny California sky —and was so badly sunburned that he couldn't work for weeks!

Television repairmen we did not survey separately. First, television hadn't become universal. Second, the same shops repair both radio and television sets.

Following somewhat the pattern we developed, many magazines have surveyed many other service fields. Recently, one of them investigated a large number of television repair shops, with findings akin to those of our radio survey.

As a new wrinkle, a skilled television man went from shop to shop "seeking work." Real television servicemen were so scarce that he never had to *prove* his skill, seldom show his tools. The first question was always: "Have you a car, so you can bring in the sets?" If he had, he was hired.

Automobiles and radios, watches and typewriters, electric irons and vacuum cleaners and such things cost more today than they did a few years ago, despite much technical progress in manufacturing methods. Television sets cost more than they ought to. Each dollar used to produced them, all along the line, is split by taxes into a fraction of its former self. Most Americans cannot afford new models when the old cease to function properly. Wars come, manufacture is suspended. Americans *must* get along with the old.

Under those circumstances, the public ought to deal wisely with the repairman, and the repairman capably and fairly with his public.

The "capably" is far more important than the "fairly." If the repairman gyps his customer out of a dollar or two on a simple overcharge, that's that; it isn't admirable, but it isn't serious. But if he says he has repaired a car, asserts that he has packed the wheel bearings and checked the brake fluid when he has not, then he sends the motorist out on the road with confidence in a car that does not deserve it. Worse, he lays that car open to danger of serious further damage, even disablement.

Pursue the chain of events from factory-to-scrap-heap where most cars land too soon.

When an automobile gives its owner repeated trouble, he trades it in. The second owner has more trouble, and the third, still more. The "blue book" value of the car grows less and less, falling much faster than should be the real worth of that piece of rolling stock.

Finally, in six or eight years, another automobile is in the junk yard. It should still be a fine machine, which might even yet have been serving its original owner.

There was a time when owners of "old model" automobiles, especially well-cared-for, were laughed at. But today these cars of ancient vintage are in great demand, are driven pridefully, and are often worth more money—if old enough—than new ones of the same make. America has many really exclusive

automobile clubs whose members, much looked-up-to, photographed constantly, travel widely in their carefully-serviced automobiles of yesteryear.

The early-day car that survived yesterday's roads will run anywhere on today's highways.

In calling the American motor car a "fine machine," we make a gross understatement. The product of America's automotive industry is truly one of the brightest achievements of a race of men who became creative by being free. Not only does it do to virtual perfection the job for which it was built, but it functions with an absolute minimum of trouble. It is by far the costliest and most intricate piece of machinery ever entrusted to the average man; yet, left alone and provided with its few simple needs, it performs its many highly complex functions day in and day out, summer and winter, whether driven by a skilled mechanic or by an elderly lady who could not distinguish between a hydramatic transmission and a carburetor.

Further—to romance about this miraculous creature—it does more than merely carry us: it warms us in winter; it cools us in summer; it gives us light at night; it magic-carpets the parlor sofa into the romantically moonlight countryside; it brings us the music of the moment and the news of the world even as it happens.

The automobile is incomparably our best servant and our most satisfactory inanimate friend. Sometimes, indeed, it seems not at all inanimate. In truth, the gypping of this machine is far more despicable than is the gypping of its owner.


GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY
GRANDPA'S FIRST AND ONLY CAR
7V
RALPH CLARK

2 *Pat's Letters*

CRITICS OF THE RESULTS of our survey have charged that we deliberately set out to find repairmen crooked, and that in order to insure that finding we selected an unusual car, the Lincoln Zephyr, and devised a mean and unusual ailment.

Precisely the opposite is true. DeWitt Wallace told us to make a survey and get the facts. Then our reasoning proceeded this way:

In order to test a large number of garages we would have to present to each of them a simple, clear-cut problem in repair. We would have to present exactly the same job to every garage. It was just like an examination in mathematics: we wanted to ask each repairman a mechanical equivalent of the problem "how much is two times two?" If he should reply "Five," it would be because he would profit thereby.

The first requirement was a sort of grand-average car, we thought. Not a Rolls-Royce nor an Isotta-Fraschini, nor a Ford. After some study we selected a 1939 Buick sedan and bought it secondhand. We bought it from a known and reliable authorized Buick dealer for $600. The dealer, whom we trusted, assured us the car was in excellent condition, not to be improved upon.

With that Buick, in December of 1940, we made a test survey. In subsequent findings we made no use of the discoveries collected with the Buick. At that time we were not starting the actual survey itself, we were prospecting around to find just how to conduct the survey. Both authors of this book drove the Buick to garages in New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Connecti-

cut, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.

John Patric, whom Mr. Wallace asked to do the eventual traveling when the survey should start and who had done prior work for the *Reader's Digest,* managed the painstaking preliminary explorations. The story of them is best told in his letters to Riis.

Bridgeport, Connecticut
December 28

DEAR BILL:

Since yesterday morning I've had the Buick in six garages. I don't think the Buick dealer who sold you the car and said it was in perfect condition was quite truthful. There seem to be quite a few things really wrong with the car—or at least things that could be fixed legitimately. However, for this preliminary test trip I'm letting the garagemen do pretty much what they like.

The first thing they always ask is: "What seems to be the matter with it?"

"It seems to run all right," I say, "but I just bought it last week and I'm going on a long trip with it. I want you to check it over and see if it needs anything to put it in first-class shape."

Garagemen seem astonished. Why should a stran-

ger—with a New York license—come in with a car that's running fine? They aren't used to it. Most of them don't know quite what to do. The cars they get are usually in trouble.

Of course I'm careful to leave everything up to them. So most of them drive it around the block, come back, say, " She seems to be in pretty fair shape. I'd suggest only a lube job, an oil change, and a tune up, perhaps."

Well, Bill, after I got the car greased once, got those nearly new plugs cleaned once, got the crankcase filled with fresh oil, I have to say that's been done. Then they say: "Well, then, I guess you're O.K.," as much as to ask: "What did you come here for, anyway? What's the big idea?"

The next guy, though, a little more enterprising, will suggest flushing the transmission and rear end and filling it with "winter-grade" lubricant. But that, too, can be done only once, legitimately.

I've been told that's sometimes a racket. I know that service stations have been known to charge for this job and then not do it. But to investigate it would mean getting under the car each time, taking a sample of lubricant, and testing it to be sure it was actually new. And once the job had been done legitimately, you couldn't make another test without draining out

the new lubricant and putting old stuff back in. Where'd we get the old stuff? It's usually dumped into the barrels of crankcase drainings. Anyhow, it would be a dickens of a job, and very slow.

The only way we could spot this kind of gyppery would be to stay and see if it were done. Then, of course, it *would* be done—though unnecessarily after the first time. But you couldn't blame a service-station man for that, because there isn't one used car in a hundred that wouldn't benefit to *some* extent from fresh lubricant. And how would a serviceman guess that this was the exception? He'd probably, if he were honest, drain the transmission and differential just on general principles, if the customer were willing, knowing that gears would last a lot longer if that job were done more often.

But I'll keep on trying to find the right kind of test.

Yours,

PAT.

Stamford, Connecticut
December 30

DEAR BILL:

Same old story today. These tests don't prove anything except that some mechanics are good and

some are not. The dealer who sold you the car said everything had been tuned up for you. But I met a most painstaking, hard-working mechanic in Bridgeport today. He did a lot of things that improved the performance of the car. He said: "If you don't mind, I'll drive the car home to lunch. It's my favorite testing route, and I know how this model ought to perform on it." He took a few tools with him and made some adjustments en route. Carburetion is certainly better. The motor no longer stalls in traffic.

The generator commutator was pretty bad and needed undercutting. The copper segments that deliver current to the brushes are insulated, as you know, with mica. That insulation should be lower than the copper. Ours wasn't. The commutator was literally "bumpy," and that's what made the needle oscillate. The battery seems to be down a little, but the fellow thought it would charge up again.

He worked on the car for an hour and a half and charged me $2.25, at the rate of $1.50 an hour. He's all right. He fixed a couple of uncertain light connections and did a lot of other little things. He rents a little shop in the corner of a big storage garage.

I got talking to another customer of this man, who said, "He's the only mechanic in town I'll let even

look at *my* car. The chap used to be foreman of a big dealer garage and quit when he was reprimanded for refusing to gyp a woman."

Yours,

PAT.

Newark, New Jersey
January 2

DEAR BILL:

Before I came down here I stopped in a few places along the Boston Post Road. One fellow—his shop was pretty busy—tested the car and said it didn't need anything. He charged me fifty cents.

The next man wasn't so busy. He was one of the smart salesman type. After he looked the car over he said: "Before you start on your long trip you need your valves ground and you need a new battery."

So I said: "The fellow who sold me the car *said* it was in perfect condition, but of course *I* don't know. Will you tell me why you think it needs these things?"

For reply the fellow tested the battery again for my benefit. He used a hydrometer. One cell read about 1175 specific gravity and the others were around 1275, where they should be. So I knew the hydrometer was O.K. I told him I'd just had the generator fixed and thought that that might have

something to do with it. He said, "No. If that were the cause, *all* the cells would be low.

"Your valves," he continued, "have never been ground. There's never been a wrench on these stud nuts." He showed me then continued: "The car has gone at least 20,000 miles, although I think the speedometer doesn't register all the miles. But even when a motor's gone 20,000 miles it *always* helps to grind the valves."

Fair enough, Bill, no argument there. I paid him for his time.

I'm beginning to think that either all garages are 100 per cent honest, and these things people say about them are wrong or due merely to carelessness and inefficiency; or else we've an entirely wrong technique.

What would happen if we brought in a car *that seemed to have something terribly wrong* but which was something instantly seen by any mechanic and fixed in a jiffy? Would they all tell the truth?

If garagemen have been unjustly pilloried all these years, that's a story, Bill.

Yours,

PAT.

Baltimore, Maryland
January 3

DEAR BILL:

One mechanic tested the car today by driving a few blocks with me. Right away he said: "Wheels seem out of line." He got out, looked at the front tires, went way up ahead, and sighted along the front wheels toward the back wheels. "Yeah, they're out," he said. "I can't tell how much until I measure. But they're out, and it'll cost twelve bucks to line them up."

Now that's a funny thing, Bill. Twenty garages, so far, including the ones you visited, tested that car, and not one of them said anything about the wheels. Nobody even mentioned checking the alignment—not even that good guy in Bridgeport. And I didn't hit anything—no rough spots in the roads and no curbs—to get the wheels out of line.

But didn't you say that some fellow tested the steering by driving the car over curbs—up and over curbs—the day you bought it? That might have knocked them out. I think you chaps who bought the car were a pair of innocents—representatives of that great class of Americans for whom the dealers touch up the rusty spots, paint the motor, dress the top, clean the upholstery, polish the body, and say: "This

car was driven just 20,000 miles by an old lady who never had it over thirty, who brought it in for lubrication every thousand miles without fail, and who sold the car because of poor health."

Otherwise the usual thing: "We'll give her a good lube job, change the oil, and tune the motor." Nothing new. If work is slack, they're a little ingenious. If they're busy, the car seems in better shape. I always pay them for their tests.

Yours,

PAT.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
January 4

DEAR BILL:

The wheels *are* out of line.

I went to three places that specialize in wheel alignment. To each I said: "Please check the wheels. I'll pay for the test at your usual rates. But I can't have the job done—no matter how badly I need it —until I return to New York."

So these fellows would have gained nothing by lying. The first one said: "Your wheels toe-out three degrees. They should toe-in one sixteenth of a degree. I can't check the camber and caster until I've

corrected the toe-out." I paid him a dollar. To fix it would be $12.

The next guy said: "The toe-out is three fifths inches."

"Does that mean three degrees?" I asked.

"No," he replied. "Toe-out is *never* measured in degrees. I've checked the camber and caster. The camber is reverse three fourths inches for the right front wheel and one fourth inches for the left front wheel. Also, a steering knuckle is bent." He went on with a lot of fancy technical explanations that weren't intended, I suspect, to be informative—merely impressive. "I charge $1.00 for testing, but if you let me fix the car, we'll knock that off. Our charge is $8.00 for labor, $3.00 for parts."

The third fellow had the same make of aligning equipment the second man had, but he didn't go into detail. He said: "The front end is pretty bad. I can fix you up for $6.50. The usual price is $12." I said that was pretty reasonable, and then he said: "You also need a motor tune up."

"How much is that?"

"Sixty cents per cylinder."

Just to sound innocent, I asked which cylinders needed tuning.

"The whole motor needs tuning," he said.

And there's how many cylinders? Six? Then that's $3.60.

But the motor doesn't need the kind of tune up he'd give it for $3.60. The carburetor is just right now. The plugs are new and clean. I know the points are O. K., for I watched a crack mechanic check them yesterday. I think this fellow just tries to sell everybody a "tune up." In my case he'd add $3.60 and $6.50 and get $10.10, or about the regular price for an alignment job. I've had plenty of experience in shops like this.

But how can we be sure, Bill? This stuff is all guesses.

I've found out little except that garages don't agree. They are certainly careless in checking automobiles. No wonder people who get their cars "all carefully checked over" before they go on trips often have unexpected trouble. Answer is, the cars *weren't* checked.

Bill, we've got to find something else. We're using up a lot of time, spending a lot of money, and finding out nothing that we didn't know before.

I've an idea that these men are 95 per cent honest but just terribly careless. Maybe that's our story. Or maybe, as you suggest, women get gypped more than the men. I'll try to get hold of a good feminine

assistant, though it would be a tough assignment for a woman.

Yours,
PAT.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
January 6

DEAR BILL:

I just thought of something.

Years ago I bummed a ride West with a crippled man who couldn't drive very well. On that rocky pass between the Imperial Valley and San Diego we came upon a Buick, stuck. I'd had a Buick like it and had done a lot of work on it. His trouble was simple. The high-tension wire from the coil—which is held in place by friction—had simply worked loose. I pushed it down and started his motor. He had no more trouble.

He wrote a note on a card, gave me the card, and asked me to stop and see him when I reached San Diego. The man ran a big hotel there, Bill, and he insisted that I occupy a suite as his guest while I was there. They were the best hotel rooms I was ever in. The management sent up free breakfasts and the latest magazines. It's amazing how grateful that guy was.

So I figure I'll pull the coil wire loose on our Buick. That trouble ought to be easy to find. If *I,* who am no mechanic, found it for the hotel man, any garageman should find it for me.

I'll let you know how it works.

Yours,

PAT.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
January 8

DEAR BILL:

I'm glad you agree that our former procedure with the Buick isn't producing anything that would make a story. Your own preliminary tests were very much like mine.

I've stalled a few times by pulling the coil wire out. Sometimes I'm towed in, sometimes the mechanic brings his tools. If I'm there, they find the trouble right away. Yesterday one mechanic charged me for "adjusting the points," which, as you know, don't need any adjusting. He didn't say a word about the wire being out of its socket. His bill read simply: "Repair Buick," and when I asked him to write down "adjust points," he got rather mad at me.

But I find it hard, except in a case like that one, to

be sure whether I'm gypped or not. After all, what's a fair charge for a tow?

Yours,
PAT.

Trenton, New Jersey
January 9

DEAR BILL:

I tried a lot more experiments today.

Been trying to figure out a way so I can drive that Buick right up to a garage and stall it out in front, so there'll not be a towing charge to confuse the issue.

So I tried pulling the coil wire almost out, running a string—doubled—through a little hole in the dash, and pulling the wire all the way loose with that string, then pulling the string back in.

The first garage I tried, it worked swell. Except that the car was stalled right near the front entrance, so when I coasted to the entrance, I blocked it. I caused a lot of trouble. The mechanics were out, and a couple of customers and I had to push the car out of the way. Just then one of the mechanics came back, apologizing for being gone. He fixed the wire, charged me nothing, "because you've been waiting so long." I felt like a heel and a chisler.

I stalled the car by the same procedure in front

of another garage, and the shop foreman looked at me through a fishy eye. "Those coil wires *do* work loose sometimes—on rough roads," he said, looking significantly at the smooth street. "Funny it happened right in front of our place."

I think the next fellow saw the marks of the string on the rubber insulation of the wire. But he didn't say anything. Nor did he overcharge.

Yours,

PAT.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
January 10

DEAR BILL:

If only I could get that wire back again without lifting the hood and making myself conspicuous! Or do something so that if I visit a garage that can't take care of me I can drive away again. It's got to be some trouble that can be created over and over again without damage—because we've got to cover the whole country on this thing if we get a formula that proves anything. You can put a spark-plug wire back without tools, and so there'd be no tool marks showing, even after 50 tests.

Yours,

PAT.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
January 12

DEAR BILL:

Having the damnedest luck. Somebody broke into the Buick last night and stole all my stuff.

I had parked on Walnut Street, right in the heart of Philadelphia, for a half-hour. When I came back, somebody had jimmied open one of the "no-draft" ventilators then apparently reached down with a wire and opened the door.

It's quite a loss—all my baggage, my typewriter (which is why I'm writing this letter with a pen at 2 A.M.), my two fine cameras from *National Geographic* days, and all the rest of my photographic equipment including flash guns, filters, light meters, etc. They took some of my clothes, including all my clean shirts.

I found a cop who seemed a little bored by the whole thing. He sent me over to the 2nd Detective Division, where I wrote out an inventory for Detective Tom Donahue to send out over the teletype. The loss comes to around $400.

I've just got to get another car for this survey and hand pick it very carefully. First, I'll have to find a make and model that can be decommissioned easily, hundreds of times, without showing any marks. It

must be something that still lets the car run but very badly indeed. And yet it must be something that will cause no damage to the motor.

I've thought of loosening distributor wires, but if they weren't entirely removed, they'd still make contact. And anyway, a car that's missing on a cylinder or two would gallop and jerk; and if driven hundreds of miles that way might not be free of damage.

It's going to be a headache, Bill. Sometimes I wish I'd never undertaken this job.

Yours,

PAT.

Pleasantville, New York
January 15

DEAR BILL:

After talking with Ford dealers about methods the Ford factory may use for checking its dealer service departments I heard this one:

"A stranger with an out-of-state car came in one day and said his car wasn't running right. I knew right away his timing was retarded. I set the timing, and because his car wasn't very old, didn't charge him anything.

"A couple of months later a factory man was in

and said: 'Jack, we checked up on your service the other day. We sent a man in here with a slight difficulty, easily fixed—and you'd be surprised what we found out about your service.'

"I was pretty scared, for all of us slip up once in a while. I asked the fellow to explain, and finally he told me: 'You rate 100 per cent in that test. Not only did you set the timing quickly and accurately, but you didn't charge the fellow anything because his car wasn't very old, and you wanted him, you said, to think well of it. More than that, you explained carefully just what had happened and told him what to do if it ever happened again. If everybody was like that, Jack, we'd have a lot fewer service headaches.' "

So you see, Bill? If an outfit like Ford finds it necessary to send checkers out to keep dealer service efficient and honest, there must be a reason for it. Suppose a fellow brought another make of car to a dealer because his garage happened to be nearest? Would the dealer be more or less honest with the owner of a make of car other than the one he sold?

We're on the right track now. Something easier to fix than a car out of timing: less hoary than the loose spark-plug wire. I'll find it.

Harry Wilcox at the *Digest* suggested that we

could puncture the diaphragm of the fuel pump. But would that be easy to find? Could that happen accidentally? The worst drawback is that every time we made a test, we'd have to remove the fuel pump, take it apart, and install a punctured diaphragm. That would take time.

I've thought of disconnecting a gas line or an air line. But again the men who tightened it up would certainly put tool marks on the fittings, and this would mean installing new lines and new fittings after each test or two.

I looked at Plymouths, Dodges, Chryslers, Fords, Chevrolets, Nashes, LaSalles—but the LaSalle is getting into too much money. We've got to appear to be in the financial position of the average man, who shouldn't be gypped out of $3.00 by a repairman—if repairmen are gyps.

The Ford dealers in Mt. Kisco are friends of Harry Wilcox. He took them into our confidence. I tried, with their shop foreman, to find a way of making a Ford or a Mercury run badly. We could throw the timing out, of course, but that's a legitimate repair operation. And it's one that Ford dealers are more used to handling. Moreover, there isn't much latitude to that adjustment, so that the trouble wouldn't seem serious enough. Some shops mightn't

know exactly where to set the timing if they didn't specialize on Fords.

I asked about the old standby, removing a spark-plug wire. The foreman said: "That's an old one. The Ford factory is always testing its service departments. They've been using that spark-wire trick for years. We're all on to it now."

That proves we're on the right track. If the Ford Motor Company is quietly checking its dealers, there must be some skulduggery.

Yours,

PAT.

Pleasantville, New York
January 16

DEAR BILL:

I've found it.

The Lincoln Zephyr has *two* coils, just as my old '32 Lincoln has. These coils are right behind the fan, cast as one unit in a plastic case. Two wires run from the coils—one from each. I went over to Mt. Kisco and borrowed a new Zephyr from the Ford dealer. It has plenty of pep. Then I stopped, took off a coil wire—and say! The car still runs, but gosh how it runs! Smooth enough, but no power at all. Scarcely

go over thirty wide open. Won't climb even a little hill except in low. Won't pass the old gravel trucks carrying stuff for the Bedford overpass.

If a man didn't know the wire was off he might think anything was wrong. Might think the clutch was slipping for a minute. Might think the brakes were dragging. Might think one set of points weren't breaking. Might think half the plugs were fouled, or the carburetor was bad. He just wouldn't know. But once you lift the hood, that wire sticks out like a bandage on a chorine's knee. There are so few exposed wires under the Zephyr hood, Bill—fewer than in most motors, it seems. Almost all the wires are enclosed, except this set.

Even a person that didn't know a thing about an automobile engine would know the wire ought to be connected to the post—just as though a reading lamp didn't work because it wasn't plugged in.

They asked me at the *Digest* if I wanted a new Zephyr, but I'm not sure. If we did get gypped out on the road, driving a new and expensive car like that, some readers might say: "Oh, the investigators probably looked like millionaires. *I* don't. *I* wouldn't get gypped—not like that."

I should think around $600 worth of automobile is about right—about average.

Before I do anything about buying another car, Bill, I'm going to try the disconnected coil-wire trick with my old Lincoln. It won't be as good a test, because anyone who looks under my hood will know, from all the gadgets I've got, that I am at least mechanically minded.

For example, I've got an extra generator driven off an overlong belt, so I can build up the batteries in my trailer and not have to use the trailer lighting plant I built out of a lawnmower engine and a starter generator. I've put in extra gas tanks, controlled by a lever on the dash, so I can use cheap fuel for running in open country and high-test gas for starting and hill-climbing. I've got rigged up a system whereby the motor heats water in the trailer tanks for the trailer shower. Hose lines run back to the trailer, carrying hot water back and bringing up cold until the trailer tanks are full of hot water. I get pressure to the shower head by starting up an old Cadillac power air pump, which I drive with an old starter motor through a bicycle chain. The same starter motor runs a suction pump so that if my trailer is parked by a stream or lake I can turn it on and suck my tanks full of water until the car radiator overflows.

One look at these contraptions—such of them as

are on the old Lincoln—and the mechanics I encounter will wonder why I'm stumped by a disconnected wire. So it is not a perfect test, but I'll try it.

I'll let you know how I come out. Think I'll try it on the Boston Post Road again. It's pretty cold. Don't know where I'll wait while the car is being "fixed."

Yours,

PAT.

TELEGRAM

GREENWICH, CONNECTICUT, 11:50 P.M.

JANUARY 16

ROGER WILLIAM RIIS

522 5TH AVENUE

NEW YORK CITY

TESTED NINE GARAGES ON POST ROAD UP TILL ELEVEN TONIGHT STOP TWO HONEST STOP SEVEN GYPS STOP ALL REPLACED COIL WIRE STOP TWO TOLD TRUTH, CHARGING FIFTY CENTS AND FORTY CENTS STOP OF THE OTHERS, ONE SAID "HALF YOUR CARBURETOR CLOGGED TWO-FIFTY," ANOTHER SAID: "MOTOR OUT OF TIME STOP TOUGH JOB STOP TWO SEVENTY-FIVE" STOP ONE SAID "POINTS TOO FAR

APART, NOT MAKING CONTACT" STOP NEXT ONE SAID: "POINTS TOO CLOSE TOGETHER, NOT BREAKING CONTACT" STOP ONE SAID HE "CLEANED SPARK PLUGS" BUT DIDN'T TOUCH THEM STOP HONEST ONES WERE RUSSIAN JEW IN PORT CHESTER, COLORED MAN AT GARAGE NEAR GREENWICH STATION STOP WRITING DETAILS STOP BUT THIS FORMULA PERFECT STOP WILL LOOK FOR ZEPHYR IF YOU APPROVE STOP

JOHN PATRIC

Nearly two months had now gone into the search for the ideal test. The importance of this preliminary study lies in what we learned from it. We learned, first of all, that we had to have absolute, firsthand knowledge that the test car was in unquestionable condition. We could not take the word of anyone else for that, we had to *know,* ourselves. We learned, secondly, that we had to devise a neat, clean-cut problem for all servicemen, and that it had to be such as would permit driving the car into a garage and driving it away again if the garage were too busy to re-

pair it. Lastly, and somewhat academically, it seemed best to find a trouble which would be quickly obvious to any man, skilled or unskilled, who might lift the car's hood, a trouble which literally cried aloud to be spotted and repaired.

Having proceeded by slow trial and error to this point we had decided that the 1939 Lincoln Zephyr was the car we wanted. Patric found one in New York. At the same time we found the expert mechanic we needed to condition the car under our eyes.

New York City
January 21

DEAR BILL:

Harry Wilcox tells me that there's one really first-class mechanic that he knows about in New York. The fellow does a lot of work for the *Reader's Digest* and has always been honest, thorough, and industrious. His name is Phil Confalone, and he rents space for a modest shop at the Palisades View Garage, at 200th Street—just where you make the last turn off from the Hudson River Parkway before hitting the toll bridge.

Although W. B. Levin, salesman for the Ford

Motor Sales on Broadway, where they have that Zephyr, assured me that the car was in mighty fine mechanical condition, he willingly went with me to Phil Confalone's place.

"Confalone," by the way, is pronounced to rhyme with "baloney," although he's remarkably free of it. We took the Zephyr for a tryout. I wanted to be sure there wasn't anything basically wrong with the car, that it hadn't been in a wreck and then repaired.

Phil Confalone thinks, as I do, that the car has run maybe 25,000 miles. It doesn't run too well. Phil thought water was leaking into the crankcase. We told Levin that if he'd take the car back to his shop and pull the heads, we'd buy the car. All this providing he'd give us new heads if the old ones were corroded—plus gaskets and other parts necessary to correct this trouble.

It took them two hours to get the head off the left bank. Sure enough, the aluminum was eaten away to such an extent that the gasket wouldn't hold.

"All right," said Levin, "we'll give you a new head."

"Let's look at the other one first," I said.

"But it doesn't leak on the other side," he protested.

"If one head's corroded, the other is bound to

be," said Phil. "It's probably ready to start leaking any time. Mr. Patric doesn't want any trouble with this car once we get it fixed."

So they pulled off the other head, and sure enough it was corroded too. Phil thinks the former owner used some corrosive anti-freeze in his radiator. The aluminum was decayed, sort of, for nearly a quarter of an inch in places.

But the rest of the car seems to be in good shape. Neither Phil nor I can find anything wrong that new parts won't correct. So I agreed to buy the car for $625 cash, provided they would supply without extra charge the required cylinder heads, etc.—about $40 worth of parts. They agreed to this, then asked me to sign a contract with about fifteen hundred words of fine print.

I sat back at Levin's desk and started to read. The type was so darned small that it was slow work. Levin said: "That's a formality. You don't have to read all that. Nobody does."

I got rather mad at that remark. I don't like these contracts that are drawn up by skilled lawyers in such detail that the customer hasn't got a chance.

Levin waited impatiently while I read on and on. "It says here," I remarked, "that no oral promises not specifically set down herein are binding. It says

that I must take delivery at your door, whereas I've specified delivery in Pleasantville."

"All that will be taken care of," said Levin.

I asked him to "type out a new contract, including these items, since nothing oral is binding." I knew it was perfectly absurd to ask their typists to write out all that rigmarole, but I wanted to see what they'd do. In the end I got first a notation on a scratch-pad then a formal promise, written on the firm's letterhead and signed by the sales manager, agreeing to all the "oral promises."

Then I signed the contract.

Levin sighed with relief. Then, getting a little confidential after the others had gone and only Phil and I were at his desk, he said:

"Patric, you're one of the toughest customers I've had in a long time. Most people come in, look at a car on the floor, see that it's clean, take our word for it that it's all right, and sign the contract without reading it. If everybody were like you, my job would be hell. But I'll tell you, people would have less complaint about the used cars they buy. Thank heaven more people aren't like you—but they'd be better off if they were."

I felt pleased. I didn't tell Levin *why* I was being so particular. He was a good guy.

I'm going down now and look for a good assistant —or accomplice, as she'll eventually be called. I'm sure you're right in thinking that women get gypped more than men. I've got some employment agencies looking for the right person.

Yours,

PAT.

New York City
January 23

DEAR BILL:

I'm having a dickens of a time finding an assistant to go with me on that trip. Most of the girls who'd *like* to take a jaunt like that think it would be a picnic; they think I want a playmate I gather when I talk to them. A couple of girls at one agency were sincere enough, but they got cold feet when I talked about the extent of the survey. The idea of traveling about the entire country with a strange man, visiting a different city every day, appalls them. I'm handicapped, too, by my inability to describe just what the work will be.

If I explained the whole project in detail, word of it might leak out to the trade journals, and our job would be ruined. Too many people know of the thing already. So some possible helpers I might get

are understandably suspicious when I can't go into detail. Of course I don't mention the *Reader's Digest*. Time enough for that when a girl gets started on the job.

Yours,
PAT.

New York City
January 25

DEAR BILL:

Phil's got the motor torn down.

Under normal circumstances I think we could grind the valves, clean the plugs, adjust the points, check the carburetor, install those new heads, adjust the brakes, and the car would be all right.

But I won't leave anything to chance. I told Phil to buy everything new that he could possibly replace on that motor. Specifically, I asked him to get a new carburetor, new generator, new distributor, new fuel pump, new gas lines, new plugs, new valves, new fan belt—besides, of course, such things as new rings and new brake lining.

He protests vigorously.

"But Mr. Patric," he says, "there's not a thing wrong with this fuel pump. It's in fine shape. It will last 50,000 miles."

"Never mind, Phil," I tell him. "Suppose you know and I know that the fuel pump is all right. Then suppose the first garage we visit tells us the fuel pump is bad. Who is right? We know *we* are, but how could we prove it? It's just the word of one mechanic against another. But suppose we've installed a brand-new fuel pump. Suppose I've watched you take it out of the Ford factory carton and put it on. Then suppose a mechanic blames the trouble on the fuel pump. Won't it be convincing to say the fuel pump is *new?*"

So Phil buys a fuel pump.

When we come to the carburetor it's the same thing all over again. "There's nothing wrong with this carburetor, Mr. Patric," he says. "This carburetor is perfect. A new one wouldn't be any better."

So I repeat what I said before, "Phil, Harry Wilcox says you're absolutely O.K. And I know you're efficient by watching you work. But how about our readers in Snohomish, Washington? Will *they* know how good a mechanic you are? No, Phil. New carburetor. New everything. No matter how good the old one is. You just take everything off that motor you can get off; buy new stuff. Let me see you open the cartons and install it. Let me see the old stuff. There's got to be no question whatever about the

condition of this car! They'll accuse us of all sorts of things, but this automobile is going to be in such fine shape, and maintained so carefully, that I hope nothing really goes wrong on the whole trip."

Phil says that by running sometimes with only half a motor we'll dilute the oil with raw gas as happens when there's excessive choking. I told him, "We'll change the oil every 500 miles if necessary." He agrees that this is the answer.

I still haven't found my accomplice. Gibbs had a girl who wanted the job very badly, but she's running away from a barren love affair—and that won't do. There was another young woman who seemed very capable, so I took her out to lunch and got talking to her about petty gyppery. She feels that it's all right. "People expect it," she says. It doesn't make her mad at all. She doesn't have enough interest, I'm afraid, to carry her along when the going gets tough.

Yours,

PAT.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
January 26

DEAR BILL:

I've found a gal who might be just the person we're looking for. She's an old friend of the Leo-

polds—a family I've known for years. She's maybe thirty-eight and the daughter of an honest old country blacksmith and wheelwright. She has a brother who's a machinist in the Philadelphia Navy Yard and another brother who's a foreman at the Glenn L. Martin factory in Baltimore.

She's grown up around mechanics and tools and has had several cars of her own. Her name, before she was married, was Lioy May Hoke—"Lioy" is pronounced like "Loy" in "Myrna Loy." Then she married a dental surgeon, Paul Schock, on the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania. For many years she has been a designer and decorator under the professional name of Lioy May, which is the way her cards and letterheads are printed.

During the World's Fair she worked for General Electric in their television department, because of her knowledge of colors and fabrics. From Jay Leopold and others I learn that she's strictly honest and extremely industrious. She can't type but she *works*. Nobody who isn't willing to work fifteen or sixteen hours a day could handle it. It's going to be tough.

She's coming up to see you. I've told her that only if you approve is she hired.

Yours,

PAT.

Pleasantville, New York
January 28

DEAR BILL:

Stopped off at Phil's garage again to see the Zephyr. He says the brakes are all right for a long time yet, but I tell him to put on new lining and replace everything he can. I don't know if some mechanic may tell us we're losing power because our brakes are dragging, but he might. So I want the brakes just right.

But Phil just *wouldn't* put in a new clutch. He says, "There isn't the slightest possibility of any mechanic, however stupid or however crooked, diagnosing our disconnected coil wire as a bad clutch." We looked the clutch over and gave it some tests, and of course he's right.

The Zephyr—I've named it Lorelei because she'll be a siren to lure the gyps—is coming along. We put in new valves and rings. You'd think Phil was reconditioning an airplane motor for a flight across the Pacific! I've been going with him to buy the new parts, just so I can report that I *saw* them go in.

Yours,

PAT.

Pleasantville, New York
February 14

DEAR BILL:

I'm about ready to start. For the tests on other things beside the car we've got the three radios and the three watches, and I bought a GE vacuum cleaner from Macy's and an electric iron. We're about set for those repairmen too.

Think I'll take my dictaphone along on the trip, Bill, and while my fellow stooge is driving I'll give you some of our adventures *orally*. Just send you the records. I'll leave the transcribing machine in your office, and all you'll have to do is cock your feet up on the desk in that comfortable office of yours and listen to the plaints of the footsore investigators.

I'm going to send you the reports on different color paper—yellow for the car, pink for the radio, blue for the watches, green for the typewriter, goldenrod for the iron, and salmon for the vacuum. It may sound silly, but you just wait until the reports pile in —it'll be easy to separate 'em.

Yours,

PAT.

Pleasantville, New York
February 20

DEAR BILL:

We've just licked a little technical problem, the kind that shows how darned careful we've got to be about details.

The wire we are going to disconnect has a ring, or O-shaped, terminal that drops down *over* a long post of brass. To remove the wire, we would have to take the holding nut all the way off—which could really not happen by itself. That *might* make the serviceman suspicious. Further, he might easily mess up the threads if he didn't have the right nut to replace the missing one. For the ring-shaped terminal we have substituted a U-shaped terminal, and all we now have to do is loosen the nut a turn or so and slip the wire backward off its post. The wire might easily do that by itself from the fan blast. Both types of terminal are common on cars, so our U-shaped job won't create any suspicion or comment.

I bought one hundred extra nuts to take with us, so that as fast as ours show damage we can install new ones.

The motor certainly looks clean for a three-year-old car. So I've bought a little fly spray gun and filled it with kerosene. When Phil's finished I'll spray

the motor lightly with kerosene and then blow a little dust through the radiator. I want the car to look as if it's gone a few hundred miles since it's been out of the shop.

Yours,
PAT.

New York City
February 23

DEAR BILL:

Called your office, but you were out.

I've been driving the Zephyr. Betty Jones drove it to the bank in Pleasantville and back. I let her drive it first in normal condition. She said it ran fine. Then I had her stop, and I removed the coil wire. Then she drove it again.

"What did you *do* to the car to make it run that way? It's simply terrible," she said.

"All right, I'll lift the hood, and *you* look. See if you can see anything wrong."

Of course she pointed to the wire right away. Anybody, even an unmechanical girl, could see it.

I had Harry Harper drive it a ways. He, too, was amazed at the simplicity of the project and at the fine condition of the old car. "You sure picked something simple," he said.

Harry had a good idea. He suggested joining the automobile club of New York. I think I will. Lioy May's coming up from Philadelphia day after tomorrow. I'm going to send her to New England for a few days, trying all sorts of garages, and while she's gone I'll have a talk with the A.A.A.

DeWitt Wallace thinks "the woman ought to make most of the car checks." Too, he insists that we pay every mechanic something, so as not to steal their time. I suggested that at the end of the trip he send a complimentary subscription to every honest mechanic we'd met. He agreed.

Yours,

PAT.

Pleasantville, New York
February 25

DEAR BILL:

Note the explanation we give the garages: "We just bought this car for $625. We were going to buy a new Ford, but on this car we saved a little over the price of a new Ford. So we had it completely overhauled. It ran fine until just down the road a little ways it suddenly lost all its power. It won't run over thirty; it won't pass a Model T; it won't pull a hill."

Then we say, "We're going out for a bite to eat" and leave Lorelei to the mercies of the mechanic.

Yours,

PAT.

Pleasantville, New York
February 27

DEAR BILL:

I was in your office, but they said *you* were in Pleasantville.

I went in to see the A.A.A. I joined it—first time I've ever been a member. I always figured the A.A.A. was for people who didn't like to change tires and who always had trouble. But it does an amazing lot for motorists.

I couldn't tell them what I was up to, of course.

But I did explain that I was going out on a story, and that sometimes I was going to pretend to be in trouble, "Just to get a chance to talk to people as I use their telephone to call the A.A.A." I've told them we'll pay all the bills that come in, for it wouldn't be fair to misuse our membership when we weren't really in trouble.

Right now the only way I can think of to see whether the official garages are more honest than those which do not bear the emblem is to stall Lorelei

on a pretty steep hill and then call the A.A.A. If they see the wire, fix it, and don't try to make a big job out of it, they're honest. And we'll pay whatever it costs the A.A.A.

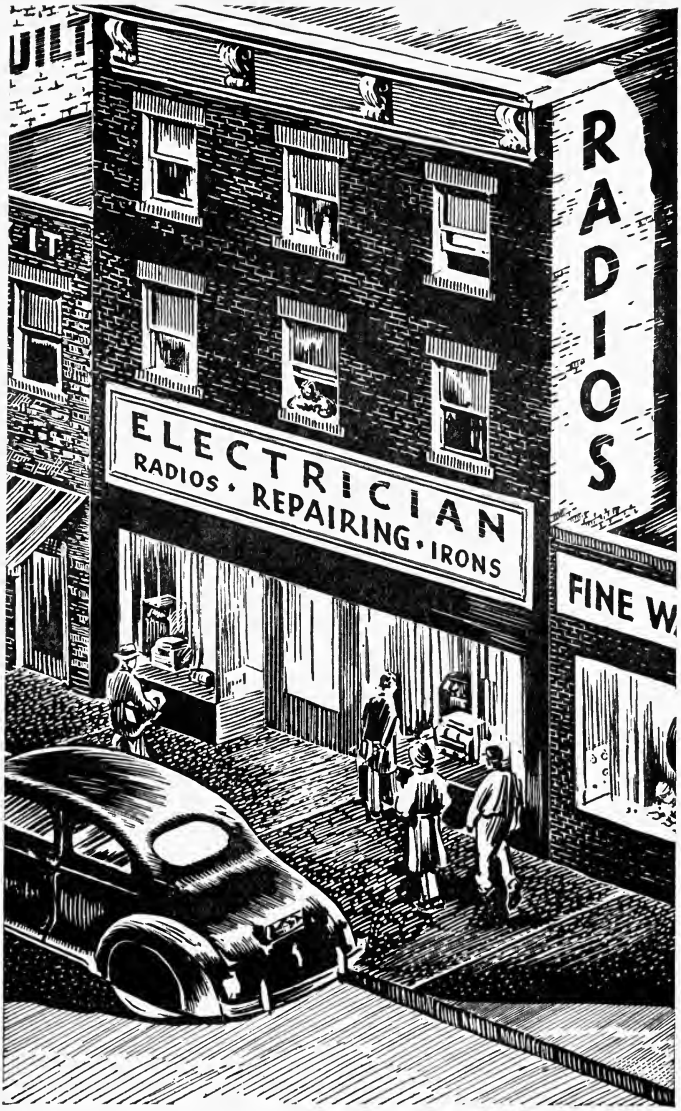
But I rather suspect that some of them may send their wreckers out, haul us in and, while the A.A.A. pays (supposedly for the towing) they might run up a wholly phony shop charge against us. I hope not. It would be a fine and constructive thing if we could report that A.A.A. garages are truthful, reliable, and honest.

We ought to leave for good about next week.

Yours,

PAT.

"Rube Goldberg Machines," we called them. Efficient and modern pieces of testing apparatus they may be, as their makers claim. But not once in our entire survey were they used by a mechanic for an honest diagnosis of our own "trouble;" they were *always* used to back up a crooked explanation of wholly imaginary mechanical defects. We felt them to be, primarily, "merchandising machines," not "essential tools."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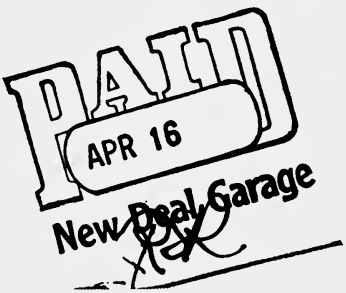
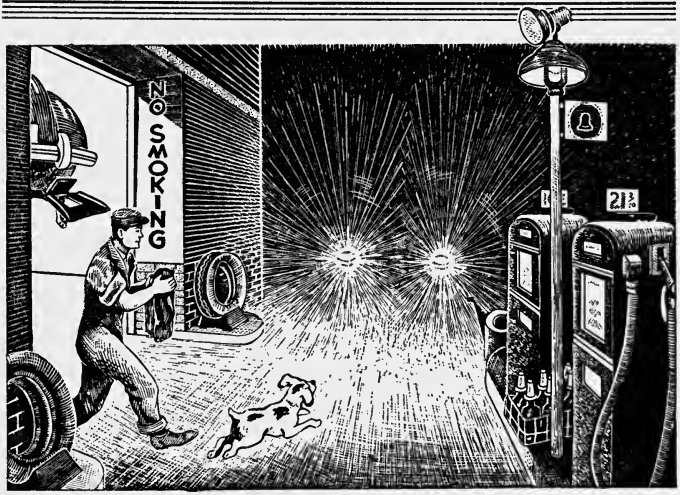
Mrs. Lioy May (Lincoln Zephyr Coupe)

New York License

Overhaul, Clean & Adjust Carburetor Parts & Labor	$7.75
New Wiring & Distributor Points	4.15
Tune Up Motor	3.75
	$15.68
State Unemployment Tax (Parts)	.13
Total	$15.81



3 *Automobiles*



THE AMERICAN AUTOMOBILE today is the finest manufactured product of our nation. Its makers have put into it astounding values—values in reliability, sturdiness, and comfort. It gives a minimum of trouble. It is so well made that many drivers never even have to look under the hood. Yet, because of this, if something does go wrong, service stations and garages are able to take astounding values out of it.

Three out of five times our investigating mo-

torists stopping for repairs at a strange garage were gypped. Three out of five garagemen overcharged, lied, invented unnecessary work, or charged for work not done, for parts not needed, for parts not installed.

That is what we found on a five months' survey that, when finally completed, covered 19,900 miles up and down and back and forth across the United States, from New England to Florida, from coast to coast. To get a true and fair sampling of repairmen throughout the country we stopped at every kind of garage and service station—dealer agencies, independent service stations, hotel garages, repair shops. The results of our sampling allow but one conclusion: *that the automobile servicing and repair business of the United States does not give its customers a square deal.*

Our two investigators submitted their Lincoln Zephyr coupé to 347 service stations and garages in all parts of the country. This automobile had been purchased secondhand for $625, which we thought the price of an average reader's car.

The machine looked well traveled but was in as perfect mechanical condition as it is possible

for a man-made machine to be. Before the journey began, remember, the car was completely overhauled by a selected mechanic and equipped with new brakes, valves, rings, pins, oil filter, fuel pump, carburetor, ignition coils, distributor, spark plugs, cylinder heads, water hoses, gas line, and generator. Constantly throughout the investigation Patric, exceptionally familiar with the mechanism of cars, rechecked the car's condition, giving it still more new parts and careful preventive service in a lean-over-backwards effort to keep the car as nearly as possible in its original condition. At all times he assured himself that they were submitting to garagemen a car with which there was nothing wrong—except for that one small but glaringly obvious defect: the disconnected wire which caused the engine to operate on only six of its twelve cylinders.

This wire was deliberately disconnected by the investigators themselves—much as you would pull the plug out of an electric socket—shortly before they drew up at each of the garages and service stations tested. It was the sort of simple maladjustment which places America's millions of motorists at the mercy of repairmen.

A minority of repairmen—129 out of 347—spotted the disconnected wire at once, told the investigators what was wrong, fixed it in a few seconds, and either asked a reasonable sum or made no charge at all. But a majority, 63 per cent, took the investigators for suckers and treated them accordingly.

The Lincoln Zephyr has twelve cylinders set in two banks of six each, one right, one left. The hood opens from the front; just under the point of the hood are the ignition coils. One feeds the right bank of cylinders, the other the left bank. Disconnect one of the wires leading to either coil and you cut off six cylinders. The car will run on the other six, but it is a feeble, unhappy, crippled car. Stepping on the gas is like stepping on a pillow.

Here is a maladjustment which stares any mechanic in the face—and right close to his face—as soon as he lifts the hood. All he has to do is to replace the dangling wire and tighten the nut holding it down. If he doesn't see it within a few minutes, he is utterly incompetent. If he does see it, but says nothing about it and pretends to find a more profitable defect, he is dishonest.

The investigators' procedure was this: a few hundred yards from a garage they would stop the car and disconnect the wire. As a rule Patric would then disappear, to take his radios and other properties to other shops, leaving Miss May, a seemingly defenseless, unmechanical woman, to drive up to the garage. There she would say she didn't understand how a car so recently overhauled could go wrong so suddenly and ask to have it fixed. If the mechanic did not say he had spotted the trouble immediately she would go round the corner "for a bite to eat." On her return she might find the car ready, pay the bill—always demanding an itemized receipt—and drive away. But often she would find a mechanic with a tale of serious trouble requiring many hours of work.

This strange highway odyssey began in the East. From Miss May's notes here is the sort of thing that happened to the investigators in New York City:

CASE 34. *Brooklyn, New York.* When I came back the mechanic was still fussing around the car—or appeared to be. I noticed that the wire

had been replaced, but he did not mention it. "What did you find wrong?" I asked. "I had to clean the carburetor." "But this car was just overhauled, and I'm sure the carburetor was cleaned." (Actually the carburetor is brand-new and we've been buying the best grades of Ethyl gas.) "What would make it get dirty so soon?" "Oh, they get that way." And he charged $2.00 for "cleaning" a new carburetor.

CASE 38. *New York City.* When the mechanic came back after testing the car around the block he said, "I have bad news for you. Your clutch plate is gone. The whole assembly was red hot." I asked how much that would cost. He said: "$23.50." I said I didn't have the money with me; could I drive the car home in that condition? "Yes, but the farther you drive it the more harm you'll do." This mechanic did not look at the clutch; and the clutch since then has done over 27,000 miles without trouble.

In New York and vicinity only two out of sixteen garagemen refrained from trying to overcharge or swindle this woman driver. The bills

and estimates averaged $4.00 for a service which eighty-one mechanics, elsewhere in the course of this investigation, casually performed for nothing. New York was bad, but it was only typical of the shame of the great cities, to which our investigation gives shocking testimony. In New York, Washington, Miami, New Orleans, Chicago, St. Louis, Dallas, San Francisco, and Los Angeles (which includes Hollywood), the gyps predominated sixty-two to twenty. Small towns and small garages were much more honest than large towns and elaborate garages. Places with less than 10,000 inhabitants proved twice as safe for the motorist as places over 10,000, which overcharged or deceived in 70 per cent of the test cases. Villages were even safer. Here are a few samples of the investigators' big-town experiences:

CASE 204. *Chicago, Illinois.* This is a very large, ultra-modern parking garage in the heart of the Loop. For customers it has a waiting salon furnished like a theater foyer or a cocktail lounge —with a carpeted floor and modernistic furniture. I was told: "Our mechanics here don't do

any major repairs. But we'll be glad to send it out for you." "No, please *don't* do that," I answered. "I'll pay for storage now, and if your mechanic here can't fix the car, please wait until I come for it in the morning, and I'll take it myself to your other garage."

I called next morning for the car and found it had been sent to the other garage, contrary to my instructions. "But I told them *not* to take it there. I said I'd take it there myself if anything was seriously wrong." "Well, you couldn't run it as it was," they told me. "You needed a new coil and a new distributor—and the motor needed tuning badly. Let's see, that'll come to $15.83." I told them that I would want the old parts and would come back for the car. I had to return four times, and it wasn't until next morning that they had an old coil in a box for me. It wasn't ours—it was at least three years old.

CASE 207. *Chicago, Illinois.* They say this garage is unique for the efficient way in which it handles and parks hundreds of cars. When I returned for the car the bill was $6.50. "What did they find wrong?" I asked. "I don't know. I'll call a man

who'll tell you." The superintendent came over and told me, "We had to remove and replace your distributor, clean and set your points." "You mean you replaced the distributor that was causing the trouble?" I said. "May I have the old one?" "We put the old one back on after we had cleaned and adjusted it thoroughly," he told me. "Also, we had to check the right bank and clean the plugs." Pat looked at the car later. You could tell the plugs hadn't even been handled, let alone cleaned, because the bodies of gnats and insects we'd picked up in the central Mississippi Valley still clung to them. Just to make sure, Pat took out the plugs and inspected them. They hadn't been touched.

(A word about the numbering of the cases: the investigators numbered all the tests in the order they were made. In a number of cases the mechanic wasn't in, or we were sent to another garage, or for one reason or another no clear-cut test was forthcoming. These cases were not included in our total of 347. But for ease of checking back and rebutting critics we have retained the original numbering scheme, which accounts

for the fact that some test cases have a number higher than 347.)

CASE 374. *San Francisco, California.* A big, swanky city garage. I said, "If you have to send this work out I don't want to leave the car." "No ma'am, we do all our work right here," was the answer. But in the morning the service manager I had talked to wasn't there; neither was the car there. In spite of my specific request and their assurances the car had been sent out. I waited an hour. Finally the car was returned with this report: "Now you'll hear the bad news. You needed a new coil." When I asked the price, he figured: "The coil alone costs $7.50; the labor is $5.00 for installing the coil, giving your motor a tune up, cleaning and adjusting the carburetor, and checking the fuel pump. The bill is $12.73 including the tax. You'll find your car will pull these hills now." Of course it would. They'd put the wire back on, and that was all that was wrong.

As you can surmise from some of these test cases of all the kinds of garages, the least satis-

factory we found were the big garages that cater to hotel guests. Almost always beautiful places with lots of plate glass, neon signs, uniformed attendants, and pretty cashiers, they were usually the places where the repairman's ethics hit bottom. You never see the mechanic who is said to have worked on your car. Many tourists are likely to deal only with the porter at the hotel door. He takes your car around to the garage, and during the night someone may or may not work on it. That man in turn sends in to his office a work sheet and never sees customer, accountant, or cashier. There is too wide a gap in responsibility between the man who does the work and the man who sees the customer. Here's a case in point we encountered in Sarasota, Florida:

CASE 131. This garage, large and imposing, is in the hotel district of Sarasota. The night attendant said: "We have no mechanic on duty now. The dayman will get on it first thing in the morning." But when I got there in the morning the day mechanic told me: "The nightman fixed this. He had to reset the timing." No mention of the dangling wire, of course. The bill was $2.00.

Another, involving a garage in the hotel district, this time in Topeka, Kansas:

CASE 245. In the morning I returned to find the place extremely busy, with a large force of men at work. "What was the trouble with my car?" I asked. The service manager called the mechanic, who said: "I cleaned your points, adjusted the carburetor, and in general gave your motor a thorough tune up. You'll find it O.K. now." The bill was for $3.40. Not a word about the disconnected wire. Dust undisturbed on the motor showed clearly that not one of these jobs had been done.

The lone encouraging note in our survey—and that was a minor one—was the competence, ability, and honesty of the men who adjusted the coil wire and told us what the trouble was without making extravagant claims or extravagant charges. Typical remarks of the honest repairmen constitute the sharpest possible criticism of the gyps.

CASE 120. *Bainbridge, Georgia.* The owner of this small repair shop had apparently already gone to bed, but he came right down, opened his

shop, got out his tools, and came out to the car. He found the trouble immediately: "You didn't have nothin' wrong 'cept this wire. She'll go all right now. See if she don't." I asked him how much we owed him. "Mister, I didn't do anything worth chargin' for." "But," I said, "you'd gone to bed. You had to get up. That's worth something." "Well, I let myself in for that," he said. "I'm used to gettin' up. All the service-station men in this little town know I'll get up an' fix people's cars—an' I'm handy, too, right here on the highway. I don't mind." "But how much do I owe you for your trouble?" "Oh, call it a quarter."

CASE 161. *New Orleans, Louisiana.* This repair garage is located across the street from New Orleans' huge charity hospital. Several young doctors wearing white uniforms were waiting for their cars. A neatly dressed, intelligent mechanic was chatting with them as he worked. Having finished with them, he lifted the hood of my car. "Oh—oh! You're running on only one bank. It'll be fixed in a minute." "How much is my bill?" I asked. "Nothing." "You'll never get

rich charging nothing," I said. "But this thing is too small to make a charge," the mechanic answered.

CASE 252. *Sherman, Texas.* This small-city garage is one square from Main Street. The mechanic here examined the motor, tightened the wire, and said: "You were only getting the benefit of half your motor. A loose connection on the coil is all that's wrong with it. Try it, and if it isn't right, come back." His charge was fifty cents.

(Note: In these small places you'll notice that we do not leave the car so often as we do in cities. There's a definite reason for this. In a small town or in the country the habit of the mechanics is to come right over, look at the engine immediately, and if we start to go, they usually say: "Just wait a little till we see what's wrong." In the cities it's just the opposite. Usually, and always in the cases of the gyps, they encourage us to *leave* the car, and often don't even look at it until we're gone.)

CASE 233. *Onawa, Iowa.* A large Chevrolet dealer serving a farming community. "Huh!"

said the night manager, "I've never seen *that* before. Lady, I was afraid you'd have to stay over until morning, but you won't. You had a coil wire off." He charged me twenty-five cents.

CASE 155. *Pickens, Mississippi.* I saw a garage combined with an old blacksmith shop in a side-road village some distance from the main north-south highway through Mississippi. The blacksmith shop was still there, in the rear, but the front of the place had been fixed a little—neatly, with cheap new lumber—so there was a canopy over the gas pump and a little office-salesroom. Back in the shop I could see a forge, anvil, welding torch, and a workbench. An old blacksmith was at work on the forge; a lanky mechanic stood at the bench. The mechanic got a light, looked at the motor, saw the loose wire, and put it back—all in about a minute. "How much?" I asked. "Ain't done nothin' Ah can charge you for, Mister." I wanted to give him some business, so I said: "Maybe I ought to have my transmission and crankcase changed. Look at 'em, will you?" A colored boy did. He stuck out a black paw on which transmission lubricant had run. The me-

chanic touched the paw, rubbed some between his fingers. "This's got pretty good body to it, Mister. I wouldn't change it yet. How's she for full down there?" Said the colored boy from underneath: "She's pretty full." But we did change the oil, as we often do.

Patric had a dictaphone installed with a transformer to step up the current of the automobile battery to the dictaphone's necessary thirty-two volts.

Lioy May liked to drive. On long, lonely stretches of road, or during heavy rainstorms, or late at night, Patric would hold his dictaphone cradled on his knees and talk to Riis, as the marvelous machine which is an automobile provided the power to record in wax the adventures of the day.

Riis, in his New York office, would park his feet on the desk, put earphones over his head, and listen to the adventures of his two colleagues who called themselves "your stooges."

Here is some of the dictaphone comment:

Lioy May is characteristically careful about slowing up for curves . . . I can see rough spots

in the road ahead. . . . So this dictaphone works out okay. . . .

We are driving toward Charleston. . . . It's raining very hard . . . road is narrow but smooth . . . Lioy does a good job of driving. . . . It's kind of fun to think about . . . sitting here in a warm, smoothly running auto, rolling through the Carolinas toward the sea, turning out occasionally for an old Negro plodding homeward in the rain . . . talking, literally talking, to you up there in New York.

Teachers Convention at Charleston . . . hotels all filled. . . . I pulled up in front of disreputable-looking cabin . . . sent Lioy on ahead. . . . Lioy said: "I can take anything you can, John Patric!" I took cabin, paying about twice as much as it was worth when it was new. . . . Old stove in there, wired together. . . . Only thing I could get for breakfast was soda pop and peanuts. . . .

On way back from Key West. . . . By daylight Saturday the trip was far too interesting to talk to you . . . alligator on highway . . . had a bowl of conch chowder . . . *lime* meringue pie at another place. . . . You can see nothing but

ocean on either side, a ribbon of concrete ahead. Nothing else will be new for me . . . I've seen all other sections of country. An orchid tree in full bloom here. . . . Too many visitors and noisy night clubs at Key West for place to be languorous and restful.

Tonight we are driving across southern Alabama. Lioy managed ten auto checks in one day in Miami. . . . Started early and worked late. . . . All the more remarkable because many made extravagant estimates. . . . She told many she was going back to hotel for the money after getting them to write out estimates.

If the trade ever got wind of what we are doing they could wire ahead our license number. For a while in Miami we were rather frightened. Lioy had been leaving the car, going for a walk, driving it away, stopping, disconnecting the wire, then driving on to another garage. Shortly before noon she noticed a prowler car following her and parking outside garage she went in. When she decided she had had enough of this, the prowler car stopped her, and the police wanted to know what it was all about. Of course she couldn't tell them. They were looking

for a Zephyr that had been stolen in Miami. They finally let her go but kept following her.

I thought if we were taken to police headquarters it might make good copy. I told her to tell the police nothing unless they considered us important enough to take before the chief. . . . I would then ask him about their local business ethics. I didn't get that chance. Prowler car continued to keep an eye on Miss May. But she wasn't bothered again.

One thing I liked about Florida was the number of benches they have in parks and around the town. I type my reports on the park bench. First I plant radio and watches with repairmen; then I leave one typewriter to be repaired. The biggest problem on this job is what to do with waiting time. It all can be used here in Florida.

As we go through little towns on the road I have Lioy drop me on one side of the town with the typewriter, then I lift the hood and disconnect the wire, and she drives into town alone, so as not to let the garagemen see a man is with her. I then walk through the town, stopping at the jeweler if there is one, and continue on down the highway on the other side until I come to a low

stone wall or a high curbstone, or a fallen palm tree or something, whereupon I sit, hold the typewriter on my knees, and write reports. Literally thousands of motorists have seen this peculiar fellow miles from nowhere, apparently, sitting beside the road typing furiously. I am sure they must at times be extremely puzzled. Back in the office they think this is "a lovely trip."

And from the long road through New Mexico and Arizona:

I pointed out to Lioy May the restored Palace of the Governors of New Mexico. In one of those rooms General Lew Wallace, then territorial governor of New Mexico, wrote most of his book, *Ben-Hur*. There certainly has been a change in American journalism since those old days, Bill. Lew Wallace wrote one of the most successful books that has ever been published about the Holy Land, and without ever having been there to get his background straight. And yet he was amazingly correct. Here we are, your two stooges, costing the *Reader's Digest* thousands of dollars, trying to hit every kind of repair

shop in every state in the Union just to be sure that a short magazine story is absolutely right. And when we're done, how many garagemen are going to say: "It's all a fake"? How many are going to think you invented it? How many are going to say we went out deliberately looking for gyps? How often are we going to be accused of simply trying to be sensational? If our critics-to-come could only be with us for a few days on this investigation and see what a terrific job in psychological research this survey really is!

But to go back to the honest repairmen, we were refreshed by their friendly candor.

CASE 86. *Pine Castle, Florida.* Driving through this sleepy town, I saw a garage with a man and a boy busy inside. The two-hundred-pound mechanic spotted the trouble in an instant; in that instant his eyes had swept over the motor from one end to the other. The fellow put the wire back on and tightened both nuts with the remark: "The other'n'd been off afore you-all got down the road much of a piece; then you wouldn't 'a' had no motor aye-tall. Y'had half a motor." I said: "Well, that's a relief. How much

do I owe you?" "You don't owe me nuthin'. I don't b'lieve in charging a man a quarter every time I lift his hood, like some o' these fellahs do. Up in Georgia I built up a good business by not doin' that, an' I've been figurin' I'd do the same here. Just been here two weeks." "Well," I told him, "you ought to have some cigars, anyway." I fished out a quarter and handed it to him. "No, I don't want your money—I thought maybe you just *had* a couple o' cigars." "Get them with this quarter, but please give me a little memo of it," I said, "partly because I keep an account of what I spend, partly because I want to remember you." "M'wife'll give y'one f'm th'other garage I had. Mama, give this man a receipt for a quarter!"

Thus, quickly and honestly, did many repairmen solve the simple problem which we placed before them. Eighty-one of them made no charge at all. Others made trifling charges, probably on the basis this honest repairman in Portland, Oregon, used: "Well, it costs something to lift a hood; the electric current on our trouble light is worth something; wear and tear on a screw-

driver is something. Suppose we say four bits?" With 129 repairmen giving us such fair, honest service as that described above, is there anything that can be said for the 63 per cent of all the repairmen we visited who were guilty of petty lying, thieving, and swindling?

For a competent and honest mechanic only one diagnosis of the Lincoln Zephyr's trouble was possible: "Disconnected coil wire." But the investigators received *seventy-four different explanations* of what was wrong. Remember this: when that car pulled into a garage there was not the least thing in the world wrong with it except that one dangling end of a wire.

Here, in small type, is a list of some of the phony explanations we received. Could the men who told us these lies be trusted to service *any* car? Could they be trusted to grease an automobile without missing a few important lubrication points each time? Could they be trusted even to inflate tires correctly unless the customer were watching? Could they be believed when they recommended "ways to add years of life to your car"? Could you be sure they had left a crankcase really clean after an overhaul job? Could

you be sure they had removed *all* the carbon? Would you be willing to swear you had actually needed those new valves—just because they'd said they installed them? Would their advice be sound as to when to install new spark plugs? Do you think men with such habits of falsehood could be trusted to keep your interests—i.e., top performance of your automobile at lowest maintenance costs—uppermost in their minds?

Some of these were duplicated a dozen times:

Exchange distributor; clean carburetor; new gaskets.
Clean carburetor; replace several wires.
Repair distributor.
Points not hitting; motor required tuning; plugs dirty.
Some wires off.
Bad timing.
Timing late; carburetor bad.
Locate miss; solder coil connection.
Blocked gas line.
Replace diaphragm in fuel pump.
Tune motor.
Coil wires broken.
Loose wires under dash.

Two new condensers.
Wire loose on coil; wire loose on condenser.
Clean right bank jet.
New coil; new distributor; set points; clean plugs; clean right bank jet.
Replace distributor plate and cone.
Clean carbon from motor.
Four wires off.
Dirty rotor and commutator.
Labor on: vacuum, plugs, coil, distributor, ignition, wiring.
Set to pick up.
Clogged carburetor; defective wire.
Condenser loose.
Set timing; adjust coil.
High-speed jets clogged.
Carburetor set wrong for high altitude.
Install new distributor points.
One half carburetor clogged.
Bad fuel pump and carburetor; several loose wires.
Wiring "all loose."
Overhaul carburetor and distributor.
Adjust float level.
Clean main motor jets.
Clean and adjust points.

Repair coil and distributor.
Remove obstruction from gas line.
Distributor short-circuited.
Condenser short-circuited.
Condenser bracket loose.
Points all loose and jumbled up.
New coil.
Adjust breaker points.
Repair distributor wires.
Pep up motor and adjust carburetor.
Repair ignition and clean carburetor.
Piece of paper got into distributor, obstructing it.
Manifold gone.
Carburetor set to make car run on six.
Solder broken wire.
Clean carburetor and install new condenser.
Change spark-plug gaps from .025 to .045.
Valves sticking.
New piston.
Clean points; adjust carburetor; tune motor.
Make right bank of cylinders fire.
Set octane selector.
Plugs scorched; points burned.
New distributor.
Distributor short-circuited.

Repair and install condenser coil.
Tighten distributor.
Repair right distributor, wires, plugs.
Entire ignition system loose.
Go all over car and tighten it.
Generator ready to fall off.
Set carburetor to burn Mexican gas; free sticky valves.
Condenser off.
New fuel pump.
Water and dirt in coil.
Distributor out of time.
Coil wire burned in half.
Fasten down coil and condensers.
Splice coil wire; clean plugs and carburetor.
Air leaking into carburetor.
Reset timing and carburetor.
Clean gas line and jets.
Gas stream and fuel bowl dirty.
Battery bad; need new one.
Lock distributor tightly.
Adjust distributor and carburetor.
Entire ignition system gone bad.
Overhaul clutch; install new parts.
Complete distributor job.
Fix timing.

Solder wires.
Timing late; points not set.
Coil wire broken; plugs fouled.
Clutch assembly burned up; it was red hot.
Broken clip.
Coil post broken off.
Make carburetor "alalices."
Trouble in firing system.
Repair sticky valves, carburetor, fuel pump, plugs, etc.
Points corroded; jets clogged.
Grind valves; clean carburetor.
Spark plugs clogged.

Some of those diagnoses are lies designed to justify $25 charges; some are thought up to justify charges that might have been quite reasonable if accompanied by a truthful explanation; some, such as this which might have been added: "Labor and trace and replace distributor coil lead wire on Zephyr motor" are simply impressively phrased versions of the truth. No man who made a fair charge for replacing the coil wire ever dressed it up like that.

But the point is this: if servicemen lie like that, when can they be trusted? Our critics say

that some of these men who lied for small sums —a few told elaborate stories for as little as fifty cents—are not dishonest, only weak. Well, would they turn "strong" enough to tell the customer the truth about his car if $20 were involved? Or $100? Or would they, on the contrary, keep the pattern of falsehood which is so often encountered when sums of hundreds of dollars are involved in a used-car deal?

Consider this sample in Dallas, Texas:

CASE 250. A beautifully lithographed folder describes this place in superlatives and avers that "You pay only standard rates." I left the car and went away. When I returned a girl in the glassed-in cashier's box called the mechanic down from the third floor to explain the bill for $3.75. The mechanic said: "Your plugs were scorched and the points were burned." (Patric's note: what a silly thing to tell us! All plugs "scorch" somewhat whenever they fire, and all points arc and burn whenever they break. *Of course* our plugs, like all plugs, were scorched! But that evening I took out a couple of plugs and examined them. They were *not* cleaned at this garage.) The me-

chanic concluded: "Your distributor needed a complete overhauling."

(Patric's note: Just a week ago we watched, in Milwaukee, a factory exchange distributor taken from a factory carton and placed in our motor. But I looked at the distributor after this Dallas case. It had not even been wiped free of the dust we had sprinkled on it. Had it been removed for overhauling, it would not have stayed dusty.)

This case illustrates an automobile credo of mine: the more emphasis there is on merchandising, the less there is on giving real value. Look at that beautiful, costly folder! Then look at our bill! Not a word about the wire! Just stick the wire back on, soak us $3.75, make a dumb generalization about spark plugs, lie about the distributor, and figure that the beautiful appearance of this garage will allay all suspicion and awe the customer.

CASE 160. *New Orleans, Louisiana.* These fellows call themselves "carburetor and ignition specialists." Two men looked at our motor. One of them put the wire back on, tested the motor by running it just enough to be sure that that was all

the trouble then took the wire off again. "Your ignition has gone bad," he told me, "and the labor will be $4.50 plus materials."

Dictaphone note from Patric:

I stopped for a visit with my friend, Harold Bell Wright, the novelist. Usually we have been very careful not to divulge what we are doing, but I told him something about our trip. He was tremendously interested because the theme of his new novel is based upon the same thing: the breakdown of old-fashioned principles among the people of the United States. "You and Riis have more than a story about crooked repairmen," he told me. "You have a story of the breakdown of those virtues which helped make America great. I hope you don't stop but go further to the logical conclusions. A terrific story, one of the most important of our time."

Over and over again, at the sight of that disconnected wire, garagemen were suddenly smitten with blindness and greed. In Florida the honest repairmen were outnumbered two to one. Two thirds of those tested overcharged or in-

dulged in various forms of skulduggery. Florida boasted of a $175,000,000 "tourist crop" last winter. The people who drove there must have contributed plenty to that total.

The investigators swung over through New Orleans then sampled the Great Lakes and the farm states and headed southwest for New Mexico, Arizona, and the coast. Sometimes the test cases went beyond the depth of casual gyppery, they were so exasperatingly barefaced.

CASE 178. *Memphis, Tennessee.* A large general repair garage. There were six mechanics at work here. One of them, large and husky, came over, lifted the hood, took one look at the coil wire, walked over to his bench, got a milk bottle full of something, and "tested" the fuel pump. While he was doing this a colored boy sauntered by. He approached the car, leaned against the front fender, and saw the disconnected coil wire. "See dis, boss?" he asked, pointing to the loose wire. The boss nodded, answering: "Yes, the fuel pump needs repairing," and charged $2.25 for it. There was nothing wrong with the fuel pump.

CASE 312. *Albuquerque, New Mexico.* The mechanic lifted the hood, spotted the loose wire at once, and replaced it instantly with his fingers. Then he got out his tools and began to remove the carburetor. "It's clogged up. You're getting only half power." "What have you done so far?" I asked (the "I" is Patric in this case). "Nothing." "Well, then, don't do anything. I've changed my mind about wanting the car fixed." Then the fellow reached for the wire to pull it off again. "Let those wires alone," I said, and put down the hood myself.

Then I asked the mechanic: "Why didn't you tell me about this wire being off? Why do you pull such tricks?" "Well," answered the mechanic, trying to laugh it off, "we've got to pay our overhead somehow." "But why steal money from people who trust you because you have such a pleasing, convincing way about you?" I asked him. Then he queried: "Did you know that wire was off when you came in?" "What do *you* think?" "Well, I'd like to know just why you did that." I told him: "Just to see whether or not you'd tell the truth to a couple of tourists—a couple of strangers from the East who come out

here to see your Western country—and I found out!" At this point the mechanic became almost raving mad. "Why, you—you—you! I ought to . . . Why, you . . . Get the hell out of here! I don't want the likes of you in my place. Get out of here—and get out fast!" I got out, but slowly.

By one experience we had in Las Vegas, Nevada, we found that occasionally gyp mechanics will get their signals crossed.

CASE 341. When I called for the car one mechanic said: "You had a wire off." I asked what the charge would be. "Oh, that oughtn't to be more than fifty cents at the most for a job like that," he told me. So I paid him the fifty cents. But when we walked over to the car there was a bill on the windshield: "Labor, $1.50." The fifty-cent mechanic was a little flustered when another mechanic came over and got the bill off the wiper. "I told this lady the bill was fifty cents for replacing a wire. What's this $1.50 here for?" Said the second mechanic: "We charge $1.00 for washing. You asked to have the car washed, didn't you?" (It had not been washed.) "No," I said. "Then where'd I get that idea?" said the

fast-thinking second mechanic. This, I found out, was what had happened: The first mechanic —the fifty-cent one—had just come to work here in Las Vegas. He'd been working in a garage in a smaller town. He knew what the trouble had been but didn't know about the bill placed under the windshield. He'd set a fifty-cent price from force of habit—and probably got a good lecture from the second mechanic after I had left.

When the first repairman article was published garagemen throughout the country set up a rousing cry of "It's the other fellow." Our original story did not give any breakdown of how many of each kind of garage we visited, because we attempted to visit garages as any tourist in trouble would, at random, in just about the ratio they existed throughout the nation. But the dealer service stations and garages immediately claimed that, since they hadn't been mentioned by name, we surely couldn't be talking about them. Many dealers even whipped up advertisements around our failure to name them as the guilty ones: "It's the independent stations they mean." But we were not making a point

about any one type of service station or garage—we were talking about them all, the whole automobile repair industry of the United States. Here is the actual breakdown: Of the 347 total test cases, 88 involved agencies or dealer service stations; 57 per cent of these were dishonest. Two hundred and fifty-nine tests involved independents; 65 per cent of these were gyps. The dealer garages have a slightly better relative percentage, yes, but they can hardly be termed lily-white!

The performance of the official A.A.A. garages, when confronted with our test, was disheartening. Though these repairmen are supposedly carefully inspected and checked up on before they are permitted to join the A.A.A.'s far-flung organization of some 12,000 member garages, our sampling of their service stations showed that in twenty-six tests their percentage of honesty was no better than the average we found.

Whether a service station is the authorized dealer for a particular manufacturer, whether it is an independent garage, or whether it has been approved by a motorists' organization seems to

make but little difference in the degree of honesty —or otherwise—with which it treats its customers. The following cases uncover the vein of gyppery which is to be found in every phase of the repair industry, often in greater proportion than the square dealing which so many citizens have too long taken for granted:

CASE 162. *New Orleans, Louisiana.* A large dealer garage that occupies a city block. An athletic, good-looking mechanic carefully put a cover on the seat to protect it then tested the car. When he had finished he said to the service manager: "Her clutch is gone." "Are you sure?" I asked. "Yes, that's what it is all right." Here the service manager chimed in: "Well, the labor for overhauling a clutch is $12, plus whatever parts are required. The parts will be extra." Of course there was nothing wrong with the clutch.

CASE 109. *Miami, Florida.* I sat in the car, as I often did, and watched the mechanic surreptitiously through the crack between the hood and the cowl. This man saw the loose wire, connected it lightly, came back to where I was sitting, and

started the motor. I could tell by the sound that it was hitting again on twelve cylinders, and of course so could he. But he took the wire off again. "Your distributor is gone," he diagnosed. "The more you drive the car the more harm you'll do. I'll call the Ford garage and find out how much a new one costs." He returned shortly to tell me that an exchange on the distributor would be $2.75 with a labor charge of a dollar more.

CASE 256. *San Antonio, Texas.* A downtown garage with two wreckers and two badly demolished automobiles standing out in front for advertising purposes. I felt as if I were driving Lorelei into a newly furnished, ultramodern kitchen for all the motor analyzing gadgets were finished in white baked enamel—very fancy indeed. The manager looked at Lorelei's motor while a delivery boy from the Ford garage—who'd brought some parts—was standing by, watching him. The manager had a screw driver in his hand, and, though hesitating, seemed about to fix the coil wire we had disconnected. Just then the boy who had been observing him went up the ramp with a fender he was delivering.

When he had gone, the manager said: "There is something wrong with the right distributor.

(Patric's note: there's only one distributor—it's in the middle.)

"Can you leave this car and come back?" When I returned there was a bill on the car for $2.50. No details. "What was wrong?" I asked. "Well, we repaired the motor, checked all your wires and all your spark plugs." He wrote it out on the receipt that I requested, making one more elaborate itemization to cover up a simple job. He didn't touch the plugs. No one, in all the cases with spark-plug trouble as a part of the diagnosis, did touch the plugs.

No districts were found quite as wedded to crooked dealing as New York and Miami—except Hollywood. In Hollywood not one garage in five was above reproach. Here are two of the more flagrant cases our investigators met with in the cinema city:

CASE 357. *Hollywood, California.* A very large and heavily staffed place. It takes up more than a city block. It has individual departments for

various types of work. I pulled into the parking area. A well-mannered service manager asked what he could do for me. I told him my trouble—the usual story which we do not vary. The fellow tried the car and said: "You have electrical trouble, not engine trouble." Then they drove the car over to a place next to the battery department and put a motor analyzer on it. The service manager looked directly at the coil wire and said: "It looks to me as if your distributor points are gone—burnt. That is a two-hour job." "How much would it cost?" I asked. "About $4.50." "Oh dear!" The fellow continued to play around the engine with his analyzer. "Perhaps you'll only need an adjustment." Then he said: "You are hitting on one side of the motor; I doubt if the coil is gone. The Lincoln Zephyr has one of the best electrical systems there is, and I've never heard of a coil burning out. But there's something wrong with the other side of your motor too. It must be your battery that is shorting. Yes, it's your battery that's shorting the distributor. Well, the only thing for you to do is to buy a first-class battery that won't do that. We have one for $24.95 that will correct your

trouble. What you need is a glass-insulated battery that is guaranteed for four years."

(Patric's note: This, of course, is pure, unadulterated hooey about any battery shorting any distributor. But by being accurate about other things he said, the man showed that he knew one trick of the garageman—to be meticulous about everything he says except where he is going to shove in the pitchfork. The two months' old battery we've been using has been giving us a hot spark, a quick start, and a snappy engine.)

At this point I asked the service manager: "Are you sure the battery is what I need? I've got some traveling across the hills I've got to do."

He said: "You mustn't use the car the way it is. Yes, I think I can get by all right without installing new points." Then he made his analyzer talk again and assured me that the $25 battery would end all my troubles.

Just then I tried to start the car, and it wouldn't start at all. The hood was down, and I couldn't see whether or not the other coil wire had been removed, but I sensed that was what had happened. I didn't want to lift the hood and expose the trick. So I said: "Haven't you got a

cheaper battery?" "You don't want a cheaper battery—you want one you can depend on." But I finally persuaded him to bring out a $12.95 battery which was installed. I had to get the car running somehow.

As they lifted the hood to install the new battery I gave the motor a quick glance. Sure enough, the other coil wire had been removed, and both were off now. While I was making sure that we got our own battery back the mechanic, quick as a wink, went to the coil on our car and slipped both wires back on with his fingers. Then he started Lorelei's motor and said: "You remember how it sounded before? Some difference now!"

(Patric's note: Later we had our "old" battery tested. This fellow told us: "Why, this battery is *hot!* There's not a thing wrong with this battery. It couldn't have made a better charge. I'd take it back to that garage and get my money back right away if I were you.")

CASE 362. *Hollywood, California.* This place is admittedly one of the country's biggest service stations. The service manager called the me-

chanic, saying: "This man specializes on Fords and Zephyrs." The mechanic looked at the engine, saw the wire off, then quickly looked away. Then he said: "Lady, your manifold is gone. One half of your motor isn't running. There's a hole burned through your manifold. To weld it would be $4.50 and another $4.50 for labor. If it's too far gone we can't weld it." Then the manager of the "mechanical department" said: "I wouldn't advise welding. This job will take a new manifold." He estimated the needed work at $24.60. I asked the service manager to show me where the hole was burned. "Down inside—hard for you to see—you wouldn't want to get all dirty. But here"—he went to a shelf of defunct parts, selected a manifold, and said—"see this hole here? Yours is burned the same place."

As the investigators headed across country they found several cases where gross incompetence was liberally added to just plain gyppery. Here are two samples:

CASE 167. *Turrell, Arkansas.* Here the village mechanic was utterly stupid. The search for the

trouble in my motor consisted of standing beside the car, with his hand on the carburetor, alternately racing and slowing down the motor. He did this about half-a-dozen times. Then a passer-by came along, looked at the motor, and said: "There's a wire off here—would that make any difference?" The mechanic tightened the wire then went back and raced the motor some more. "Doesn't make much," he said.

And one case, in Seattle, Washington, the last one of our survey, revealed a degree of carelessness that was almost incredible. This mechanic was crippled.

One of the first things he did was to shut off the gas line by turning the valve. Then, apparently in order to sell some cheap gas, he said I was out of gas. I said: "But the gauge shows I've plenty." He thought the gauge must be broken and put in the gas. Then the car wouldn't run at all. To show me that "he knew what he was talking about," he poured gas into the top of the carburetor, having taken off the air cleaner—and the engine would, of course, run for a moment or two. Then he said: "I guess you need a fuel

pump," and started taking off everything he could remove from the top of the motor—and doing it with incredible carelessness.

I was afraid that after he was through the car wouldn't run at all, so I "just happened to notice" the loose wire. "Should that wire be off?" I asked innocently. "Doesn't matter," said he, replacing it. Then he continued to remove pipe lines. "You need a fuel pump all right," and he said he'd need a little time to get one.

I went to a bum restaurant near by for a hamburger and coffee, and when I came back he was waiting for me before putting back *our own fuel pump,* which he had wiped clean. He didn't seem to care how he worked as he put the gas line back on. When he had everything reassembled and thought I wasn't looking, he turned on the gas valve again. Of course the engine would run, but gas spouted out of a couple of connections. He tied string around them. I paid the bill, which came to $3.38 exclusive of the gas, and drove carefully toward the hotel. On the way I stopped and lifted the hood—gasoline was streaming out of the defective connection onto the motor. I parked the car and got Patric. It

was too late to get anything fixed tonight. Patric took a cake of hotel soap, soaked it in hot water until it got soft then took it to the car. He piled it around the connection like putty, and that stopped the leak. We'll have to have the sabotage remedied tomorrow, and *not* at that garage!

One repairman, though unquestionably incompetent, treated our investigators honestly:

CASE 94. *Delray Beach, Florida.* The young mechanic in a big tire company's service station looked like a college boy just here for the winter. He looked under the hood but apparently saw nothing wrong there, so he jacked up the car and turned the wheels by hand to see "if the wheels are dragging." But he decided it wasn't that. "Lady, I'll have to drive this car to see what the trouble really is." So he drove the car down the highway. Lorelei will go fairly fast on six, and the fellow gave the motor all the gas it would take. "I guess it's the clutch," the fellow said, starting back. "It must be the clutch." Not wanting him to tear the clutch down with Patric sitting on a park bench typing reports, I said: "No, I don't think it's the clutch. Because once when a

clutch went bad on me it didn't act *this* way. It gave out gradually—and this went bad all at once."

The fellow got back to his place and after looking again at the motor and not seeing the loose wire that every little side-road mechanic had found at once, so far, he decided he'd "have to take off the carburetor." That, it seemed to me, was enough of a survey. I asked: "Isn't this wire supposed to be connected to something?" The fellow actually appeared to be dumfounded. I think he was. I don't think he knew anything at all about automobiles. He wouldn't take any money from me for his trouble and he appeared abashed not to have noticed the wire.

And one mechanic, at least, combined an air of frivolity with his gyppery:

CASE 59. *Durham, North Carolina.* The mechanic tried the car out after he had heard my usual story and said: "You certainly haven't any power in that motor." I stayed not far away—there was no place handy to go—and I observed that the mechanic found the trouble right away. But then he asked me to go for another road test.

He drove the car about ten miles, most of the time as fast as the car and the road would permit —around 70 m.p.h. I begged him to go slower. He responded: "What's the matter, gun-shy?" Then he went on: "What are you doing tonight? You're staying in Durham, aren't you?" I said I was married, and, to keep out of trouble, told him my husband was in Durham. "Couldn't you ditch your husband for a few hours?" he wanted to know. Finally we got back to the garage after one of the wildest rides I ever had. He said: "Just a distributor out of adjustment. I adjusted it all up for you. It'll be a dollar."

Early in our survey we found that repairmen were very touchy on the matter of giving us back our old parts—usually because they hadn't put in any new ones. One of our ten points of advice to motorists is: "Ask in advance for the return of any parts replaced. You will be less likely to be given something rescued from the scrap pile." We discovered this principle through the painful process of personal experience. Time after time, when we asked for the return of parts mechanics said they had replaced, we were met with eva-

sion, deceit, and all manner of strange gyrations.

A man in Raleigh, North Carolina, whose bill was $5.00 for parts and labor, said, "By 'parts' in this case we mean a gallon of special chemical we ran through your engine to free up the valves. You don't want the empty can, surely?"

CASE 55. *Norfolk, Virginia.* This garage occupies an entire block. The mechanic who waited on me found the trouble at once—I could see his hands through the crack behind the raised hood. But before I knew it he had removed one of the condensers. I wondered what else he would take off and got out and asked him how long it would take to fix the car. "I'm sending the boy for a new condenser. He'll be back here in about ten minutes." The fellow dallied around with the motor a little, giving the illusion of doing something to it, and finally put my old condenser back on—it's in first-class condition, of course, being brand-new. The mechanic had talked with a boy, as if he *had* sent the boy for parts. I asked for the old condenser when I asked for the bill. He disappeared and returned with a miserable wreck of a condenser. It was apparently the only one

he could find in the trash can. It had a break in it; it hadn't even been wiped off; it looked like a condenser from an early model Ford. I asked for a receipt and had an awful time getting it. He tried to give me one on a plain piece of paper, but I finally got him to make one out on the garage billhead for $1.85. We shipped the condenser via fast mail to Bill in New York to add to what we call the Riis Museum.

CASE 290. *Laredo, Texas.* This garage is located right on the bank of the Rio Grande, on the road that leads into Mexico across the International Bridge. When I returned for the car the mechanic told me: "You needed a new fuel pump. I've just put one on." "That's funny," I said. "Not many weeks ago the car was gone over thoroughly; they installed a new fuel pump." The mechanic said: "No, they didn't."

(Patric's note: Yes, they *did!* I saw it come out of its factory carton and Confalone said: "It's a shame to put on a new one when your old one is perfect.")

The mechanic figured out the bill; it would be $4.50. I told him I'd like the old pump, maybe

I could get a refund. He shouted: "Get that pump—that old fuel pump—the lady wants it." The mechanic brought a pump, and I had him wrap it up. The pump he gave us had never been on Lorelei. Among other things its innards were rusty; ours, being new, had no time to rust. We shipped it to Bill for the museum.

CASE 110. *Miami, Florida.* A huge place, with this slogan on its billhead: "You *Must* Be Pleased." Three men looked under my hood, and all of them must have seen the trouble at once. One said: "Lady, can you leave this car for a while?" I asked him how long it would take. "Oh, an hour or so." I left the car. When I returned a smooth-talking man said apologetically: "We had to install a new condenser. Yours was burnt out. And—oh—yes, we cleaned your points and checked your distributor. I don't think you'll have any further trouble." When I got the bill I asked for the old condenser. "Sure, you can have it if I can find it. But you know they just give those things a toss and throw them away." He looked on the workbenches and in the scrap can and then said: "If you'll come back in the

morning we'll give it to you. The mechanic has gone home, and I don't know what he did with it." The bill was $2.50 for labor and sixty-five cents for the forty-cent condenser the garage did not install.

CASE 173. *New Orleans, Louisiana.* A big garage run in connection with a hotel. There was a bill for $2.00 when we came to get the car, but nothing on the bill to show what had been fixed. No one on the first floor knew what had been done to the car. Finally they located the mechanic upstairs, who said: "I had to adjust the carburetor, set your points, and I had to solder a new clip on the coil wire." Seizing upon this tangible trifle, I asked the mechanic if he would come downstairs and show me the new clip (it was the same one that had been on the car when I took off the wire). "Where was the clip you had to put on?" I asked him. "Here"—he pointed to the clip we'd unfastened. I took the wires off and said: "Why, those clips are both alike; where's the one you took off?" "Upstairs in the junk, I guess," answered the mechanic. "Well, let's go find it. I came to this garage be-

cause I'm a member of the New York Auto Club, and I want to see that old clip. I didn't sell it to you."

The boy went over to one of those endless chain-elevator contraptions and got aboard. I started to follow. He said: "You'll have to go up the ramp. Customers aren't allowed on this elevator." I gathered that he was trying to get upstairs ahead of me and set the stage—how, I don't know. So I said: "Then why are *you* taking the elevator? Please come with me—all I want is that old clip you said you took off." Then the mechanic got panicky and said: "Well, if you feel that way I—I—I just won't make any charge." We went down again, and I told the manager that the mechanic had said I could have my money back. "That doesn't make a damn to me," the service manager said, his suave manner gone. "We set your plugs——" "And put on a new clip that didn't go on at all," I interjected. "All right," he said, "we'll knock off a quarter for the clip." As the manager was making out an itemized receipt he said to the mechanic with mock gravity: "Well, if we've got to go to jail for this we may as well go."

CASE 306. *Santa Fe, New Mexico.* Had we been the ordinary tourists we are supposed to be, we would have observed, when we checked in at the big hotel here, some of these cards by the desk in the lobby and under the glass on the dressers in our rooms: "NOTICE: We sincerely regret to inform you that a city ordinance prohibits the parking of automobiles on the streets after 2 A.M." Such ordinances, common even in small towns, are called "the garageman's law." So we should have gone down to the car and, although this was quite unnecessary on this balmy evening in this well-lighted, well-policed, usually crime-free town, parked it in the nearest storage garage. So that is just what we did.

"We had to replace the distributor plate and a distributor cone," I was told in the morning. I asked for the old ones. "Oh, they were thrown out," replied the attendant without hesitation, "and the garbage has already been gathered up this morning."

And to conclude the samples of legerdemain that involved the return of "our old parts" the following case indicates how the unethical stand-

ards of the repairmen became even bolder than average when they were dealing with women customers:

CASE 308. *Roswell, New Mexico.* By this time the Zephyr has become very muddy and again looks as if we've been on a long cross-country jaunt, from all the detours we've encountered because of the rainiest spring in some twenty years. I pulled into this garage, situated next to a hotel, paid the storage charge in advance, and left it with the usual story. In the morning my bill was $3.06. "What was the trouble?" I asked innocently. One of the well-dressed owners in the office said: "We had to install a new set of distributor points." I asked them for an itemized bill, got it, then for "the old parts you took out." The owner turned to a well-dressed mechanic and said: "The lady would like the old parts you took out of her car. She wants to take them back to New York with her." So the mechanic handed me "my old parts"—they were a couple of little gadgets I'd never seen before. I took them to Patric, who was writing up cases. He said: "Why, these are carburetor parts."

We took them to a parts store to have them identified. Here we were told: "These are an economizer valve and an inlet seat—looks as if they were out of a Packard 110. There was a Chandler carburetor that used parts like this. But they aren't points at all, and the only place they'd fit your Zephyr would be in the glove compartment or in your fishing-tackle box—they'd make good sinkers."

Confusion of the customer by strange names and esoteric gadgets is made easier, in some garages, by elaborate new diagnosing machines which we called "Rube Goldbergs." These are impressive structures with plate glass and a glistening array of strange tubes, knobs, dials, and columns of mercury. The mechanic would hook a "Rube Goldberg" up with our car's motor, turn knobs, read dials, and report that poor Lorelei was suffering from half-a-dozen ailments, all expensive and, as far as our test car was concerned, entirely imaginary. Naturally a certain number of testing devices are necessary to the good repairman; but the fancy cabinets and dressed-up appearances of the "Rube Gold-

bergs" are not. They are too often too obviously made to impress the customer. Not one of these "Goldberg machines" said anything to the mechanic that led him to the real trouble—the disconnected wire.

Salesmen of these devices call them "business producers" or "merchandising machines," meaning that they make it easier to sell repair jobs to the motorist. As one scornful garage owner remarked: "I'd buy one of them if the salesman could show me how they help service a car; all they do is service your bills." These machines cannot lie of their own accord, but men who manipulated them admitted in confidence that they could be made to say either Mamma or Papa. "Rube Goldbergs" are not manufactured and sold as simple and efficient tools but are dressed up to impress the customer and are sold with that appeal extremely prominent. Here, for example, are two catalogue descriptions:

MOTOR TESTER

A POSITIVE BUSINESS PRODUCER. Every dollar you invest in a Master Motor Tester begins to earn you a satisfactory PROFIT from the day you install the instrument.

It is a matter of record that most service stations write the entire investment off their books within 90 days' time IN ACTUAL MONEY EARNED.

MOTOR TESTER—A SUPER BUSINESS-BUILDING PIECE OF EQUIPMENT, actually sells needed service. Service has to be sold. Nothing helps sell service like an "X" Motor Tester.

BATTERY STARTER TESTER. Helps you sell new batteries, starter overhauls, ground cables, starter cables, and starter switches.

On our survey we found that the "Rube Goldbergs" were likely to be used to merchandise repairs even when the car had nothing more wrong with it than a dangling coil wire. Using an amazingly scientific-looking contraption, a mechanic in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, announced that it was necessary to repair the distributor and carburetor, tune up the motor, and "free" the valves. Here is another test case in which the investigators made a firsthand acquaintance with "merchandising machines."

CASE 96. *Tavernier, Florida.* For miles beside the new "highway that goes to the sea" along the Florida Keys you see signs advertising this garage. I drove the car in on half an engine. The mechanic gave the motor scarcely a glance. Instead, he backed up to the car a most impressive-looking Rube Goldberg machine. It sits on a tripod and consists of a three-foot-high case lined in crimson. Inside the glass cover of this case is a set of glass tubes with a number of twists and bends ending in a mercury column. If the mercury rose to a place on the gauge where it read "leaky manifold," why, that was certainly what was wrong. Other positions indicated "carburetor out of order," "sticky valves," "leaky intake," "advanced motor," "motor surge," "cracked manifold," etc., etc. After consulting this machine the mechanic first told us that the carburetor was dirty, then that we needed a new fuel pump, and finally that we needed work which would come to a total of $20. At that I pointed out the disconnected wire to the mechanic and asked if that made any difference. With unruffled calm he replied: "Oh, I took that off myself to get a better test."

Another device used by many repairmen to pad their bills is the "tune up." No two garagemen mean the same thing by it, and it is impossible for the average motorist to tell just what has —or has not—been done to his car. Never be satisfied with the explanation, "We gave it a tune up" as a description of what you are paying for. Demand specific itemization.

CASE 93. *West Palm Beach, Florida.* There are dozens of men employed in this huge station, one of a nationwide chain. Up on the wall was a big sign titled "$3.50 Worth of Work for $1.00," and then a list of "FORTY OPERATIONS IN ONE," with a list of "forty things we do when we lubricate a car." I left the car with the usual story but also asked for the grease job.

In the morning the bill was $2.64, which breaks down to "Motor Tune Up, $1.49; Lubrication, $1.00; Zerk Fitting, fifteen cents." "What did you do to the motor?" I asked. "Oh," the mechanic said, "we tuned it up." "But what specifically did you do to correct our trouble?" "The nightman did it—and he's gone." Lorelei had been greased, all right, but they had not done all

of their "Forty operations in one." I pointed at the sign and said to the service manager: "You didn't do all those things, did you?" "Well, we did most of them anyway." I asked him: "Then why doesn't your sign say: 'We do *most* of these operations for $1.00'?"

CASE 360. *Hollywood, California.* When I returned for the car it was in what they called the "proving ground," with all the Rube Goldberg devices attached. The coil wire was still off. The mechanic's tale of woe was a dismal one: "This job will take four hours. You'll have to leave it. You mustn't drive the car this way. I can't say yet exactly what's wrong but half your engine is completely dead. A motor tune up would help a little."

I asked him how much a motor tune up was. "A motor tune up is $5.50, but that isn't enough. You'll need your distributor synchronized and carbon cleaned. You need a new fuel pump. You ought to have new plugs. Your distributor will require new parts. You'll need two condensers, and we'll have to have a carburetor repair kit too." The estimate which he wrote down for me

added up to $25. The fellow let me drive away ("to come back tomorrow") with the coil wire still dangling in midair after he had unhooked the impressive apparatus that is part of his "proving ground."

(Patric's note: What on earth does a motor tune up include, if all the rest of these operations are something extra? If the distributor is gone over, carburetor fixed, new plugs installed, carbon cleaned, new condensers, new fuel pump installed, then what else is there to require $5.50 worth of "tuning"?)

CASE 276. *Laredo, Texas.* I told the nightman the usual tale about buying the car for $625, having it fixed, about how it had run fine until "about twenty miles out all of a sudden it started running badly—as if it were trying to climb a tough hill on high, even when it was on the level." I asked the nightman to see if he could fix it. The bill next morning was for $3.50. "What did they have to do? What caused my trouble?" I wanted to know. "Oh, we went all over it and tightened it." The fellow continued: "We fixed your lights, we fixed the doors so they

wouldn't rattle, and your generator was about to fall off." That was their complete diagnosis of our trouble.

CASE 251. *Dallas, Texas.* This garage has a large repair shop. I showed our club membership card and said I'd come here because I'd get more dependable service if I went to official garages when I had trouble. The superintendent called the mechanic, who pulled the car over by the window and lifted the hood. I went down and waited an hour and a half in the lounging room—every minute expecting the car would be ready. Finally they said it was done, and the office man made out the bill. "Did you ever have that motor tuned up?" he asked. "Well, it was reconditioned not long ago. And it was running perfectly, just as fine as a car could run, until about twenty miles out of Dallas it went bad all of a sudden."

"Well, our work comes to $7.16." I requested an itemized bill. He made it out and told me: "We had to exchange your distributor, but because you are club members we're giving you 25 per cent off on the parts." "What did the tuning

of the engine take in?" I asked. "Spark plugs, carburetor, and general tune up," was the answer.

(Patric's note: Spark plugs were *not* cleaned. I took out a couple and looked. Also the distributor on our car, after they had "exchanged" it, hadn't even been wiped off.)

This automotive survey left us with complete skepticism in regard to slogans, mottoes, guarantees, and advertising signs on garages. It is a regrettable fact that we were cheated by the "Authorized Service" and "Official Garage" places whether they bore the name of an automobile manufacturer or an automobile club or association, as well as by the independents. We ran into repeated evidence of how some car manufacturers send men around the country with simple ailments, like loose spark-plug wires, to check up on their authorized agents. But seemingly the field is too large and the pickings too rich. Many agents can't resist that easy chance and take the risk of being found out by the parent organization.

As the investigators moved from coast to coast,

making test after test of the repairmen, it often became something of a major problem to keep the car looking as an ordinary tourist's car should look. We were never particularly worried that news of what we were doing would leak out. As Patric said, "Even if anyone did get wind of it, they wouldn't believe it; no one could ever believe that someone would spend good money purposely to get gypped from coast to coast." But it was sometimes difficult to keep the mechanics who worked on the Zephyr from leaving marks that would make the next man suspicious. Patric explains the solution to one such problem in this supplementary report:

It might be well to mention what we must do now before every experiment or two. Our Zephyr motor is now very dusty. But when a mechanic works on the coil, or pretends to, he knocks the dust off the coil by wiping it or leaving finger marks, and therefore the coil shows that the car has just been worked on.

So we have a ten-cent fly spray gun, and we spray the coil lightly with kerosene. Then we wipe dust off the inside of the wheels and beat the dustcloth on the fan belt until the coil is

covered with dust. Then a couple of flicks of the cloth on the coil, and it looks as if it hadn't been touched since the last overhaul.

We must also paint a couple of places on the radiator shell, where mechanics' arms, reaching down always in the same place to connect the coil wire, have worn the paint off a little. Nobody but us would notice it probably. But we'll take no chances.

One unexpected source of what might have been petty politics or what might have been graft is illustrated by this Tampa, Florida, case:

CASE 119. As we left the previous garage we saw two wreckers tearing down Florida Avenue about 70 m.p.h. with a motor cop tailing them. Thirty blocks down the road there was a traffic snarl. There'd been a wreck, and there were *six* shiny wreckers on the job, with the cop giving speeding tickets to two of them. It was late evening. We wondered how all those wreckers had reached the scene so quickly when we hadn't been able to find more than one garage open for service in Tampa after a half-hour's hunt.

Finally we saw a little barnlike garage near

the scene of the wreck; we drove into this place on half a motor. A forty-year-old mechanic with most of his front teeth gone spotted the loose wire instantly and said: "You was carryin' one of your motors for a spare." "I was what?" "Them Zephyrs has just the same as two motors; they got two condensers, two coils, two banks of cylinders. You was runnin' on only one of 'em." "What do I owe you?" I asked. "Oh, a coupla thousand bucks and we'll call it square."

I tried to pay the fellow, tried my damnedest to get him to take at least a quarter, but he wouldn't. "I'm from Kansas City," he said, "an' I expect to be here quite a spell. I don't want you Northerners to think you get gypped *every* place you go, like you'd get gypped if you was that guy that just had the wreck over there."

"How'd those six wreckers get there so fast?" "Oh, it's a racket. The city of Tampa charges 'em a good big license fee to operate wreckers, and then the boys that run the wreckers sit around and play poker and listen to short-wave radios. When a police call comes in about a wreck somewheres, they're off like a bat outta hell, tryin' to

get to the wreck first and get hooked on. Six of 'em over there."

"Do they run garages too?" "Some of 'em. Mostly they just run wreckers an' take the work to whatever garage will give them a cut—they gotta, because they gotta pay graft to be allowed to listen in on the police radio. But you let one of 'em haul you in an' you're stuck. If you don't let 'em fix the car where they want it fixed, they soak you twenty bucks or so for haulin' you in. They get you comin' and goin'."

Cops to whom we talked at the scene of the wreck admitted, not to graft, but to "petty politics as the cause of this damned racket."

One garageman in Holbrook, Arizona (he overcharged us), engaged in an informal conversation with our investigators sounded the advance note of a chorus that repairmen by the dozens were to take up later in their own defense. It was a logical criticism of motorists who neglect car maintenance. This serviceman said:

"Some of these tourists deserve the kind of treatment they get from repairmen. Fellow came in here not long ago. I put in some gas and looked

at his oil. He needed some, and then I noticed the oil line to his filter was leaking. I said he'd better let me put on a new line. He asked, 'How much?' and I said six bits. He said, 'You're too damned high,' and drove off. Few hours later I heard him coming. Sure enough, the same car limped by here with at least two bearings gone. It cost him $35 or $40 to get it fixed down the street. If he'd let me put that oil line on while it was just cracked, before the thing broke clear off, as it must of, why, he'd have saved all that."

Many repairmen whose shops and garages we tested didn't have the slightest desire to discuss mechanical details with the investigators, or to explain their charges. In Savannah, Georgia, a serviceman who was asked to explain his charge for "repairs to ignition" answered: "Lady, when the doctor gives you pills he doesn't say what ails you. If you knew as much about an engine as we do, we wouldn't be in business." Others were more communicative. One fast, low-priced and capable man in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, asked to rate the difficulty of the test we were presenting, said:

"Well, a dumb mechanic might take ten min-

utes to find that disconnected wire, if he were really dumb. A good mechanic ought to find it, if he didn't happen to notice it at once, in three minutes at the outside. But listen, if you really want to tie a mechanic up in knots—and find out how really good he is—just put a pencil mark across the accumulator in the distributor." "Ah," said Patric, "and the current will jump along the pencil mark instead of across the points?" "Yeah. And you'd be surprised at what that will make an engine do. I've seen a lot of fine mechanics work over that thing for an hour and not find what was wrong!"

"But," said Pat, "that wouldn't be fair to the mechanics, then. After all, we're not looking for miracles. We're just looking for ordinarily honest service. We want to distinguish the guys that put this wire back and charge us $2.50 for overhauling the carburetor. It would be good for you if somebody stopped them; your customers would be easier to deal with if they hadn't been gypped so often." "You're right about that," the fellow said. "Life *would* be a lot pleasanter if there weren't any gyps."

Another of the ten points of advice which we

urge motorists to follow in dealing with their repairmen is "demand itemized bills." Here is a case in which following this simple rule helped very appreciably:

CASE 195. *Paducah, Kentucky.* A large, well-equipped dealer agency, giving twenty-four-hour service. When I returned for the car the service manager said that it was done, and that the bill would be $1.50. "What was wrong?" "Your timing was late and your points weren't set right." "Please give me a bill, and write on it just what you told me about the timing and the points," I said. The fellow made out the bill as I requested, but made the charge only $1.00 instead of $1.50. This has happened before with us —ask for an itemization, and the amount is reduced.

For the gyppery they suffer, usually in blissful ignorance, drivers themselves are largely to blame. For the motorist who cherishes his pocketbook and his car, here are ten positive commandments to be followed:

1. If possible, stay with the car and watch the

mechanic work. The job will be better done, for he can't be sure how little you really know.

2. Avoid strange garages as much as you can. Most of them never expect to see your face again.

3. Remember that the big garages, the ones "recommended" by a hotel, the ones with neon lights and Rube Goldberg machines, are likely to be less honest than the smaller places where the owner works. For square, competent service, seek out a garage where farmers go. In cities, places that specialize in repairing trucks are less likely to have the gypping habit. It's harder to fool a truck driver.

4. Ask in advance for the return of any parts replaced. You will be less likely to be given something rescued from the scrap pile.

5. Whenever possible, tell the mechanic exactly what is wrong with your car. Give its symptoms precisely. Don't let him get away with a "tune up" of the motor, which may mean that he has done anything—or nothing.

6. Demand an *itemized* receipt on the garage's printed billhead. Reluctance to put villainy down in black and white sometimes results in lower bills.

7. Study the shop equipment. Ask yourself honestly whether it was designed primarily for work or to impress you. Remember that lathes, drill presses, valve facers, grinding wheels, electric drills, as well as humble wrenches, are designed for workmen, not, as some modern Goldbergs are, designed to "create customer confidence" and sell more service.

8. One kind of mechanic to look for is one whose chief interest is "fixing something." He is seldom a good businessman, so he's usually found in a small shop. Every job is a challenge, to be fixed quickly, at the lowest possible price. Be careful that this man doesn't *under*charge you. He isn't thinking about money; you have to do that for him.

9. Above all, be very wary and watchful. Don't hesitate to challenge every charge; to demand explicit proof of its necessity. Skepticism is your only chance of reducing the odds that are against you.

10. When you find a capable and honest mechanic, be honest with him. Be loyal to him. Let no one else work on your car except in emergencies, for you have made a priceless discovery.

4 *Radios*

WHEN WE SET OUT to pose a simple problem in elementary honesty for radio repairmen from coast to coast, we followed the same principles as we had followed in the auto-repair field. That is, we created in the radio the simplest possible mechanical defect, instantly obvious on opening the set. It was just this simple: we loosened a tube. The loosened tube, nearest the back of the set, stuck up like a wobbling signpost; you could not help but see it. In this test we used Zenith

"wavemagnet" portable sets, three of which we bought new for the survey.

But in order to collect the largest possible number of test cases we bought another radio, a pocket RCA. There was an advantage to the use of this smaller set. "While Lioy May has the car out on tests," wrote Patric in a report on the first case involving the RCA, "I have to tote the Zenith. I might carry two Zeniths well enough, but you can't go into a radio shop with both of them. So I wrap up the RCA and carry it like a box of hardware under my arm. I plant the Zenith first and pick it up last, so that I never appear to a radioman to be carrying two sets. This extra radio speeds up our work in places where there are many shops." In this little set we sometimes loosened a tube, but usually we disconnected one of the two snap-on wires from the "B" battery. This, too, is just as obvious to any inspecting eye as it can possibly be.

In every case, before entering a repair shop, the investigator tested the radio to make certain that it was playing as well as ever then loosened the tube or slipped off the wire and walked into the repair shop.

How did the repairmen meet this simplest of problems? Well, the first thirty-six radio shops visited, in Eastern cities and towns, sold the investigators thirty-two new tubes. *Not one tube was needed.* Does this raise in your mind a suspicion about the last couple of tubes your repairman sold you? In the face of such experience, is it possible to merely shrug one's shoulders and say, "There are gyps in every industry"?

Perhaps the public has helped create this broad habit of petty theft. Said a mechanic in Camden, New Jersey, annoyed at Miss May for asking specifically what had been wrong, "Most people don't ask anything about it so long as the radio plays. They're just glad it's fixed." But, whatever the cause, this investigation proved that the habit had become nationwide in the radio-repair industry. *Of 304 shops, of every type, in every state, 195 tried by one device or another to take advantage of the customer.* Some critics call it gross incompetence; we call it downright dishonesty. The investigators ran into it 64 per cent of the time.

Remember, this was the simplest kind of test with which a radio repairman could be con-

fronted. A radio magazine once sent to scores of random shops a set with only a broken speaker wire and received diagnoses as varied as ours and higher estimates. But our "trouble" was far simpler. Seventy-six repairmen proved that by detecting the trouble the instant they removed the back of the set. These men pushed back the tube or hooked up the wire, usually laughed, and refused to make a charge. Thirty-three others, equally truthful, made a charge so moderate as to class them also as honest. The straightforward service which these 109 honest men rendered puts the majority of the radio repairmen to shame:

CASE 56. *Suffolk, Virginia.* A friendly looking kid waited on me. He quickly found the loose tube in the RCA with the remark: "This tube had nothing to hold it solid." Then he tried the radio and it played. "What was the matter?" I asked, pretending not to have noticed what he did. "Just pushed a tube in, that's all. There won't be any charge for that." "What's your name?" I asked. "Ebenezer, but everybody calls me Sneezer. I'm a high-school student, learning the radio business for high-school credit. It's

kind of a vocational course, you see, with the high school co-operating with the people who can teach students a trade."

CASE 300. *Cheyenne, Wyoming.* A large radio parts-and-supply house. "We don't as a rule repair radio sets," the fellow said, "but since you're here, I'll look at yours. Here's your trouble. Simple, hey? Now she plays fine. No, no charge for that."

CASE 223. *Albuquerque, New Mexico.* An old-established side-street place into which I took the radio with the loose wire. The fellow opened the set, immediately saw the loose battery wire, replaced it, listened to the set, and said: "It seems to be all right now." "What do I owe you?" "Call it a quarter." "I'm glad I came here," I said, and mentioned some of the things he might have told me. "There are shops that do that," the fellow grinned, "but we aren't one of them. There's plenty of real work to be done without inventing things people don't need. We like to make customers, not drive them away. We hate to make a charge for little things like that, but we've got to charge something to help cover our

overhead." "I'm not kicking," I answered; "I'm glad you found the trouble so quickly."

CASE 103. *Deland, Florida.* "I'm not the radioman," said the clerk, "I'm on the selling end. Well, I can look at it. I used to fool around with radios, but I gave it up. Why, here's a loose tube. That's all. Now she plays. Oh no, I couldn't charge for pushing in a tube."

Such frank dealing with customers was refreshingly at variance with the practices of the majority of radio-repair shops encountered by the investigators. Out of every one hundred tests the customer was cheated sixty-four times by the repairman. Is it, or is it not, a fair inference, therefore, that sixty-four times out of one hundred the radio repairman will sell a strange customer tubes, batteries, and services which his set doesn't need or charge him for parts he didn't even put in? Some radiomen lied for small amounts; will a man who lies for a dollar suddenly turn truthful if he sees $20 ahead?

The larger the town, the more frequent the swindling. Radio shops in places with a population under 10,000 were 51 per cent dishonest,

while in larger cities the percentage of gyppery rose to 66 per cent. Seventeen out of the nineteen shops tested in New York and vicinity gave false diagnoses and ran up wholly unjustified bills to a total of $35.75. In one week the "radiotricians" of the great metropolitan area took from us *more than the cost of our new $30 set.*

CASE 31. *New York City.* A medium-sized shop. Miss May left the set; when I called for it an attached bill read "three tubes blown." Surprised, I asked, "But what would blow three tubes?" "You left the switch on." "But that shouldn't blow three tubes. What about people who play their radio all night?" I asked. "Well, that would do it too." The man became very nervous at this point, twisted his face, rubbed his head, anxious to get rid of me. Beside the set were three evidently blown tubes. It was quite obvious he had picked out three bad tubes to substantiate his statement. He hadn't expected to be dealing with a man; when he made out the bill he was thinking only of the gentle-mannered Miss May.

A great deal of the cheating involved tubes. Tubes are the great radio racket. In order to get

a conclusive check-up on the repairman's juggling of our high-grade standard tubes we found it essential to have marked tubes. The following excerpts from Patric's survey notes give some indication of the care with which we set the stage for the investigation:

Supplementary report. Mr. Wallace made the suggestion that these radio tubes of ours be marked in some secret way. Each tube carries the familiar legend: "Made in the U.S.A." So on all our tubes I scratched off the periods from the U.S.A., making it U S A. I figured nobody but a printer, proofreader, or such would notice that. This unpunctuated "U S A" uncovered a variety of subterfuges employed by mechanics who charged for new tubes when they had not changed any; who took out the set's costly tubes and installed inferior ones; or deliberately burned out the tubes in fictitious "tests." Our own tubes, which were Zenith tubes, come in stout boxes sealed by the manufacturers, making substitution impossible—if the customer sees the seal broken and the box opened. Makers are well aware of servicemen's dishonesty; that is why they seal their tube cartons.

CASE 51. *Salisbury, Maryland.* The bill was marked: "New tube, $1.55." "I'd like to talk to the man that put it in," I said. "You'll have to wait. He's out for a while," was the answer. I waited. He came back. "May I have the old tube?" I asked. "It was a Zenith." Meanwhile I saw that he had replaced a tube—not the one I had loosened—with one of another make. The fellow looked all over his shop for a Zenith tube. Finally he went outside and talked to another man. Then he came in, went to the shelves where he keeps his cartons of new tubes, and *from an already opened* carton took a Zenith. *It was our good tube, all right, marked U S A, and he simply had added it to his own stock.*

CASE 15. *York, Pennsylvania.* When I returned to get the set I found this verdict: "Three tubes blown out—$6.50." "Gosh," I said, "I can't afford that. I'll have to think it over." So I took the radio away and inspected it. The loose tube had been pushed down into its socket. But now the set wouldn't play at all; clearly they had checked it, found what was wrong, and then tampered with it. So back went the radio: the re-

pairman made a considerable show of taking new tubes from their boxes, putting them in the radio, wrapping the "blown" tubes, and giving them to us with the receipt—for $6.50.

CASE 176. *Milwaukee, Wisconsin.* "You had a condenser blown and a tube burned out—$2.50." I asked for the old tube and the old condenser. "Here's the old condenser," he said, picking one off the floor, one too large ever to have been in our set. "But the tube will take longer to find." I heard him hunting, and in ten minutes he came out, triumphant and relieved, with a tube. Meanwhile I had checked my set. I still had all my "U S A" tubes. One glance at his "U.S.A." tube, and I said, "Sorry, but that has never been in my set." He looked blank and scared, and faltered, "I don't know what you mean." "Mister," I said, "you know exactly what I mean." He seemed relieved when, paying nothing, I walked out.

CASE 79. (Let's call him Korber.) *Charlotte, North Carolina.* A radioman put on a transparently false show of testing the tubes and decided two were bad but that there was still more trouble in the set. So the investigator left it, spe-

cifying that he wanted all old parts kept for him. When he returned there were no old parts for him.

"We took the tubes to the Zenith distributor and exchanged them for new ones. So we have to charge you only $1.50 for service." So I went out, bought a postal money order for $1.50, and returned to Korber. The two tubes he had put in were not Zenith, but off-brand. "You got an exchange from Zenith but put off-brand tubes in my set?" I queried. "They're fine tubes we put in," he said. "Mr. Korber," I said, "I have paid you with a postal money order because if you cash it you may be liable for misuse of the mails." Korber, poise and suavity gone, blurted, "But I'm clean. I didn't charge you for anything, just for service."

Why is the retail servicing of radios so ridden with deceit? The best answer was given by a candid repairman in Chicago. Caught in the act of cheating, he confessed everything. We later learned he had been fined by the Department of Weights and Measures for selling short-measure aerial wire. He said to us: "Mister, you've got

me. I admit you're right. I didn't put in a new tube. Your tubes were all right. We'll give you your money back if you'll give us the bill and the tube. We have to do that sort of thing. Everybody else does it—everybody in the radio business. Fellow comes in here with a $30 radio and says 'Fix it.' Why shouldn't we get two, three bucks from him? We've got rent of $300 a month, we've got taxes. Most of the time radios come in there's nothing much more wrong with them than there was with yours. But suppose we charged a customer fifty cents. Think we'd make a friend of him? No, we wouldn't. He'd just think we didn't really fix his radio—he'd think we couldn't have done a good job for fifty cents. See that customer that just went out of here? See how pleased he was? Well, I fixed his radio, between other customers, with ten cents' worth of wire. I charged him three and a half and he's tickled to death.

"If you'd taken your radio over across the street, they'd have done the same as I did. Why, one woman went over there needing one tube, and they sold her six. You can't get away from shops around here for less than a couple of dollars. So

why blame us for doing something everybody else—big and little—does?

"The public doesn't know a damned thing about radios, and you've got to make them think that *you* do. The public is a bunch of chiselers anyway. Let the public learn something about them. That's the only way they can keep from paying too much."

The above plea of guilty makes it sound as if it were impossible for a radio repairman to give cheap, good, honest service. But contrast that situation with the following cases of straightforward dealing which the investigators discovered:

CASE 44. *Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.* The man took the tubes over to a testing machine while I watched. Finally he located a bent prong on one of the tubes that had been causing the trouble. He only wanted a quarter. "I could have gypped you easy," the fellow said. "I could have pressed the wrong button and told you a tube was bad. But I've been in business eighteen years. That kind of thing doesn't pay in a small town."

CASE 114. *Miami, Florida.* "I'm not the radioman," said the clerk. "He won't be back until to-

morrow. . . . Well, I know a *little* about radios. Here, there's nothing wrong—only a tube popped out of the socket." He wouldn't accept any money for it.

CASE 41. *Reading, Pennsylvania.* The first three electric and radio stores I went to in Reading referred me to this place, saying the man there was a good, reliable mechanic. I left the radio and started toward the door. Just as my hand grasped the knob the mechanic yelled at me: "Hey—your radio's fixed already." I walked back into the shop, saying "Already?" "Just a tube loose," he answered. He made no charge for his work.

A particularly distressing phenomenon of the radio investigation and of the other surveys, too, was the frequency with which the woman investigator was gypped among the repairmen we surveyed. Chivalry was apparently a dead letter. Miss May was cheated sixty-eight times out of every hundred times in the radio investigation, Patric only sixty times per hundred. The average woman's complete lack of mechanical knowledge, her disinclination to question bills,

her hesitancy in demanding the return of old parts make her an easier mark than the male customers. Particularly when dealing with the woman investigator did repairmen fake technical-sounding disorders to cover their crookedness.

Said one radio repairman in Tallahassee, Florida: "It's hard to say exactly what I did to your set. I removed some of the invisible oxidation." More indifferent mechanics would not specify anything further than "repairs." "One of the tubes was temperamental" was the explanation given by one man in San Luis Obispo, California. This case in Moscow, Idaho, reveals the attitude of many repairmen toward being specific with their customers:

CASE 274. "You're all done. Plays fine now—it'll be $1.50," the repairman told me when I returned. "Had to solder a loose connection." I asked him to show me where. "I couldn't do that without taking the set all apart again." "That's all right," I said; "you can charge me extra." He fumbled nervously with the set. "You annoy me, standing here," he said. "Please go over there

and sit down." "I want to see what you did," I said. "I want to see where you did that solder job —not some future solder job." When I insisted on his itemizing "soldering a loose connection" on the receipt, the mechanic said: "Listen, I don't know who you are or what your game is. But I'll tell you right now we never tell a customer what's wrong with his radio, and why? Because he wouldn't understand us. *Especially women.* Can we go into technical detail with customers? They'd get all confused. *So we just tell them whatever sounds most reasonable.* That's the way we keep our customers satisfied."

Again it was the woman investigator who was the victim of one of the radio survey's costliest contacts with dishonest repairmen in an exceptionally well-equipped shop in Baltimore, Maryland.

CASE 18. Upon my return, after leaving the radio set, the proprietor greeted me affably. "You needed three new tubes, but we thought we ought to contact you before making the change, especially since we did not have the tubes in the

shop. They are a new design, hard to get." (This was a lie.) I said, "Oh well, since the tubes are hard to get I'd better take the radio along." He answered: "We can get those tubes in a couple of hours." "I haven't that much time." "Well, maybe we could get them in an hour." The efficient-looking girl in the office said, "But we'll be closed by then." The proprietor put in, "It happens I have to stay a little overtime." So I returned, only thirty minutes later; the mythical new tubes it would take so long to get were "in" and the set was ready, indicating that the tube story was more phony even than usual. The bill—$6.80.

Early in the radio survey we discovered that dishonest repairmen displayed a marked aversion toward specifying on their bills exactly what they said they had done to our radios. As the investigators swung southward along the coast, then headed west across the country, time after time they encountered mechanics, willing to lie orally, unwilling to lie in writing, who hid their crookedness behind vaguely worded receipts. Sometimes Patric would press these men to be

specific about itemizing repairs they said they had made—and the mechanics would go through all sorts of fantastic maneuvers:

CASE 245. *San Francisco, California.* "You had a wire loose. I soldered it good for you," the man told me. "How much do I owe you?" I asked. "Two dollars and a half." The fellow looked at me and studied my face. Then he said: "But you can knock off the two dollars and call it fifty cents." "Fine," I said. "That's mighty nice of you. Now please write me out a receipt and tell me, on that receipt, exactly what wire it was you soldered."

"I haven't any receipts," the mechanic said. "Well, would you write it on a piece of paper and sign it?" "Oh," he said, "it wasn't anything. There was a loose tube too. That was more important than the wire." "Never mind about the tube," I said. "It's the wire I'm interested in. Here's your fifty cents. Now please write out a receipt. Just say you soldered a wire, and sign the receipt."

"Oh, it was such a little thing. I don't like to charge you anything." I answered, "But I'm not

objecting to the charge. It's fair enough. You soldered a wire, and I want to pay you. But I must have a receipt saying which wire you soldered." But the fellow refused to make out any receipt and finally refused to make *any* charge.

When the investigators attempted to recover old parts which repairmen claimed they had replaced it usually proved as hard as taming the wind. This imaginary "replacing of parts" was a persistent source of evasion and deceit.

CASE 130. *Tallahassee, Florida.* This was an RCA case. The man said: "You had a tube blown—little bitty thing about the size of your finger. Luckily I happened to have a new one. They sell at $1.55." "Fine, please give me the old one." "Sure, unless the colored man has thrown it in the trash." The fellow went out in the rear for a few minutes then returned. "That colored boy done went an' carried it home with him!" "H'm," I said. "What would a colored boy want of a blown-out radio tube?" "I dunno, but that's what he did." I took a look at the "new tube" that he said he had put in my set. It was the one

that had been in there when I brought the set into the shop!

CASE 33. *Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.* "It needed three tubes. Your bill isn't much," the mechanic told me, adding up some numbers to the amount of $4.25. I asked for the old tubes. "Those have been thrown outside in the trash." Then he turned to his co-worker and said, "That door to the outside is locked, isn't it?" It was obvious they had no old tubes to give me. I paid $4.25 for a typewritten receipt—the actual labor.

In not a few cases the investigators met outright sabotage. One man in Dallas, Texas, spread apart the center socket so that the center post made no connection. One in Milwaukee twisted a connection so it would not function. This instance of dexterity on the RCA took place in Memphis, Tennessee:

CASE 152. The mechanic pulled out my B battery, put in a fresh one, and hooked up the disconnected battery wire. The set played, of course. I expressed surprise that my old battery had burned out so soon and started to put it back. "I'll do it for you," he said, and put it back up-

side down, so the set was dead. "I think you have it upside down," I remarked.

"All right, just to show you," he said, and turned the battery around. Then he held the wires in reverse by a sleight-of-hand trick, so that the positive wire touched the negative pole, and vice versa. I commented on that and asked him to change them and snap them into place. He did; but this time he pulled a tube loose so the set wouldn't play.

CASE 53. *Crisfield, Maryland.* Completely disregarding the loose tube, the man began testing on a tube tester. One tube he said was bad, the others O.K. He didn't have Zeniths, so I paid the labor charge of $1.25 and left. The set now would not play; one tube's filament had been burned out like a bad light.

An honest mechanic, in Norfolk, showed Patric how this could be done on a standard tube tester. "The flash is so faint you can't see it unless you turn the lights out. Here's a weak old tube. I'll show you the trick"—and he did.

In the face of such handling of the radios by the repairmen it becomes difficult to remember

that these were brand-new sets, in excellent condition, which had been playing perfectly until the very minute the investigators walked into the repair shop. And the repairmen examined these good radios, and produced, by way of alibi and evasion, no less than sixty-eight different explanations of what was wrong; sixty-eight embroidered untruths. These diagnoses indicate ingenuity at least:

Singing tube
Tube paralyzed
Microphonic tube
Three tubes out of sockets
Condenser popped
Shorted condenser gang
Repair loud-speaker
Overhaul radio
Switch points dirty
Remove partial short
Aerial lead kinked
Change calibration
Wire broken on antenna coil
Solder loud-speaker wire
Solder oscillating coil
Solder transformer
Piece of solder left in tube socket at factory
Set out of alignment
Voltage surge
Remove whistle from set

Some of the repairmen got tough:

CASE 133. *Andalusia, Alabama.* I was given a smooth line by the manager. Said he'd checked this and that, tuned everything up, adjusted the

set, and soldered a broken wire. "Where was the wire?" I asked him. He showed me one that had been soldered at the factory.

I handed him a silver dollar and said, "Now, please make me out an itemized receipt and put down those things you did." "Sure thing." He made one out and omitted the soldered wire. I said, "But please include the wire you soldered. That's important, too, isn't it?" "Why do you have to have that?" "I just like itemized receipts, that's all." Then the fellow wrote down, "Repair broken connection."

"I'm sorry, sir," I said, "but this won't do either. You're an electrician. You know that technically a broken connection might mean a thing so simple as an open switch, or a tube out of its socket. You *said* you soldered this wire; that it was broken. Please put that down just as you told it to me." "But why do you have to have that written down?" the fellow asked. "Mister," I said, "you'd be surprised if you knew. But since you did solder a broken wire, I can't see what objection you have to writing it down."

Then the fellow's face grew livid with rage. "I've never had anybody act like you since I've

been in business." And he hauled off and was about to take a poke at me but customers restrained him. "Tell me what you want me to write," he said, still boiling mad. "Write just what you told me you did. Then I'll be satisfied." "I'll meet you outside, and then you won't be satisfied, you——" he muttered. "That sounds like a threat of bodily violence," I said. "Do you threaten your customers just because they want receipts?" "Well," he stormed, "nobody else ever insists on that kind of receipts." At last, in desperation, he wrote out the receipt.

CASE 165. *Lincoln, Illinois.* "You had a burned-out tube," said the repairman—"$2.30." I spotted my "U S A" tube on the bench beside him. "Now just for my own satisfaction," I asked, "please test that tube that's burned out." So the guy deliberately pressed the wrong buttons and made the tube test "shorted" and then "bad." I said, "I still can't see how such a new tube would have burned out. I'm going to put it back in the radio and try it again." He protested, but I took out his tube and put mine back in. Of course the radio played fine. I said, not angrily,

"I don't think I need a new tube at all." "Well, then, you owe me a dollar for service," he told me.

Then I did show anger. *"For service?* What service? For telling me my good tube was burned out? You may call that service, but I don't." Then he got awfully mad, rushed at me and landed a terrific kick on my right thigh. I said, "Mister, you shouldn't have done that. You just must not kick your customers." Then he whined, "I want my dollar." I said, "The only way you'll get that is to come with me to the police station." "I didn't kick you hard," he pleaded. I went to a doctor, who painted a four-inch skinned place with iodine; then I got a policeman and we went back to the radio shop. But the man was gone, and nobody knew when he would be back.

Several relieving comic notes occurred in the course of the radio check. In Paducah, Kentucky, a man found the loose tube immediately but stated that the tones were bad and the speaker needed repair. The investigator queried him till he admitted that the loose tube had been the whole trouble.

"But I let you off easy. Some shops here would charge you $6.00 for what I did." At this point I told him that I knew the tube had been loose, that I was checking radio shops. "Then," exclaimed his wife, "you came in here just to see if we would tell you lies? I don't think that's being fair."

CASE 304. *Chicago, Illinois.* There was a charge of $1.00 when I returned. "What was wrong?" I asked. "There was a loose connection." "How did you fix it?" One clerk said, "We usually have to solder them." "Where was it?" I asked, opening the radio. "Don't know as you can see it," said the other clerk. "But if the loose connection were simply a battery wire off, *like this,* would the charge be $1.00 just the same?" I queried. "We don't charge for things like that," answered the clerk. "Then I may assume you *did* have to solder something, or the charge wouldn't be $1.00?" "Yes."

"Since you're sure it was a solder job," I said, "would you write me the bill that way? You see, I don't mind paying for a solder job at the rate of $1.00." Without hesitation the fellow wrote the

bill: "Solder loose connection." Then I had an idea. "Would you be willing, if I asked you, to make it out to the Better Business Bureau?"

The fellow wrote part of a capital "B" before he tumbled. Then he grabbed the phone and got the mechanic who had worked on the set. "Tell me exactly what you had to do. The notation says loose connection. That all? Well, you make me out a liar down here." There was no charge, then. The first clerk assured me in no uncertain terms of the reliability of this outfit, and how this was "just a slip-up." But Miss May had paid the same shop even more.

The tour of radio shops revealed that there is considerable use of elaborate testing panels. In honest hands, the better of this Rube Goldberg equipment is helpful in trouble-shooting. In dishonest hands, even the best of it can be made to give any desired diagnosis, as the investigators discovered in so many of the cases they encountered. Virtually every shop has on its counter a smaller machine with rows of mysterious gadgets, flashing lights, and a dial indicating "Good" and "Bad." A crooked dealer, by pressing the

wrong combinations of buttons or switches, can show that any tube is "Bad." Rube Goldbergs can be of real value to an honest repairman; but in our investigation we found that they gave dishonest mechanics great opportunities to practice their gyppery.

The testimony of the operators themselves on this subject is eloquent. We have already cited the case in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania (Case 44), where an honest repairman revealed how easy it would have been to deceive us with his testing panel. In Madison, Wisconsin, the proprietor of an exceptionally fine and honest shop was asked why he used no such machines. He said: "Don't need all that stuff. Of course those things make a beautiful display, but about all you need is a voltmeter and a few other little things. I've got all the testing equipment right here on this little tool cart. It doesn't make the beautiful display that those fancy panels make, but you don't need as much test equipment for most work as people think." A lecturer in a radio school said, "No good serviceman has any use for such a machine, except to merchandise tubes and convince customers. Make no mistake about that."

At one point in the transcontinental journey Patric stopped some days to attend a radio school. His curiosity was well rewarded, for the proprietor said to him privately: "It will take a year to learn the radio business, but we can teach you enough so you can fool the public in about three months." And an instructor later went on to give some highly instructive advice, interesting to the radio owner, for whom it was *not* intended.

"When you operate your own shop, hire a serviceman, but pay him a commission, not a salary. He will take a part that costs five cents, put it in a radio, and charge for a $3.00 or $4.00 service job. The trick is to get these jobs out fast. A good man will turn out six or eight an hour. Suppose he does make $100 a week on commission—you're getting $300 worth of work.

"Never do any home radio servicing. Never do any work while the customer watches you. Otherwise you can't get a good price. You should advertise home service, yes, but go into the home with only a little equipment and say you'll have to take the set back to the shop to work on it.

"Nine tenths of the stuff that goes into a radio when it is serviced is something the radio didn't

need. Put in new by-pass condensers and such whether the set needs them now or not. You get a good price for them, and they cost only a few cents. If you don't do that, in a couple of months a condenser may go bad, and the customer may think you did a bum job.

"*Never* give the customer the old parts you take out. He'll take them down the street and a gyp shop will tell him they would have sold him for $1.25 what you sold him for $2.50. What does the customer know about quality?"

Where, then, lies the hope for the public, confronted with a situation such as that uncovered by our survey of radio shops? There *is* hope. Though honesty in little things may have gone into temporary eclipse, it surely has not been entirely obliterated by the widespread habit of petty thievery. The stability in this industry, the responsibility, ought to rest with the manufacturers. Why do they not take an aggressive interest in stamping out this dishonesty? They would probably sell more and better sets if the cost of keeping them were less often increased by repairmen's overcharges and swindling. The good will they build up at great cost is constantly

being broken down by repairmen who explain high charges for imaginary repairs by blaming "poor workmanship at the factory."

When our article appeared, not one maker of radios either wrote us or came to see us, as so many automobile makers had done. They didn't seem to care. Letters by the score from repairmen blamed poor manufacturing methods for much of radio gyppery. "Radios aren't as well made as they were ten years ago" . . . "There are so many different models—no standardization whatever . . . that we must buy $100 worth of manuals and blueprints merely to have the wiring charts of the sets that come into our shop" . . . "Manufacturers don't want to sell better radios—they want to sell cheaper ones at high prices. They go bad, and we get the headaches."

None of our auto mechanic critics blamed the car makers for poor material and workmanship. Virtually *all* of our radio mechanic critics blamed the radio manufacturers.

As for the customer, let him seek to acquire an elementary knowledge of how a radio works. Or let him seek the advice of a friendly "ham"—an amateur operator who from his own experi-

ence can recommend a competent and honest shop. Insist on getting new tubes in factory-sealed cartons. Ask for the old parts. Insist on itemized bills stating in detail precisely what the job was. It may even be wise to identify tubes by marking them in some secret manner. Neighbors might check their repairmen and compare notes.

It may be possible for some towns to adopt the system which our investigators found working well in Reading, Pennsylvania, where three shops referred the job to a radio center, which promptly and honestly serviced the test radio. Again, it may be possible for service shops to organize their own self-policing organizations, planned for protecting customers, not white-washing members, or enabling members to get higher prices by displaying certificates and toothless "Codes of Ethics" and calling themselves "Certified" or "Approved." There are some. A radio guild functioned in Miami once but folded up. "It was a good thing," testified an ex-member. "It cleaned out a lot of crooks."

5 *Watches*

THE WATCHMAKER'S CRAFT is an ancient and honorable one. In theory, the watchmaker is the descendant of a true guild. You might say that watchmakers have been in the truth business for over four hundred years, for the essence of a watch most certainly is truth-telling. It would therefore be reasonable to expect these craftsmen to be as honest as the beautiful machines with which they deal.

But in actual fact, the watchmaker today is fre-

quently not at all a watchmaker, he is a watch repairer. Sometimes he is neither of these, but a high-pressure salesman who farms out his repair work. Whatever he is, he is permitting his fellows to prostitute the watchmaking art. His is one of the few handcrafts which can flourish even in an age of mass production; yet he himself is betraying it.

Just about half of the watch-repair shops gypped us. That is what we discovered as we submitted to watchmakers in all forty-eight states watches with the simplest possible trouble. We obtained 462 clean-cut tests; in 236 the watchmaker made the simple repair easily and swiftly. But 226 of them gave long-winded diagnoses of this or that technical difficulty, lying, overcharging, performing sleight of hand to wring dollars out of the investigators.

The watches themselves gave no trouble; they were in perfect condition at the start of the investigation, and by resort to honest repairmen they were kept in as nearly perfect condition as the sabotage and clumsy handling of the crooks permitted. Yet the watchmakers prescribed uncounted cleanings, seventy-six new mainsprings,

fourteen new winding springs, ten new winding stems, half-a-dozen new click springs, and gave fifty other explanations, often bordering on the grotesque, of what was wrong or needed. Time after time they said things like "thread stripped," "cogs gone," "washers worn," "new clutch spring." Among the more imaginative diagnoses were "this watch is in bad shape," "this has slipped its chuck," "has half-a-dozen screws loose," "needs all new parts."

We found 49 per cent of the watch men gyps. A veteran of the business insists the true percentage is eighty.

This betrayal of their trade is all the more irritating when you consider how personal and cherished an object a watch is. Almost everyone has pride in his or her watch; everyone depends on it in important moments. Further, the American watch today is the best in the world; it is accurate (a good watch will run within a minute a month), reasonable in price, standardized in mechanism, easy to repair, and exceedingly durable for so delicate a machine. All the more shame to those dishonest and greedy men who mishandle it for profit.

Americans own some 75,000,000 watches and in normal times buy annually nearly $2,000,000 worth of new ones from the three big American makers. This is no small field for grafters.

Four watches of different types were used on our investigation, carefully selected to present to the "expert" the simplest of problems. They were all famous American makes: Elgin, Hamilton, and Waltham. One was a wrist watch. Two were bought new for the investigation, one was bought secondhand, one was a real old-timer; but all were cleaned and regulated before the tour started. They cost from $10 to $40—a price range which includes 70 per cent of American watches.

Every watch has what is called a "crown wheel." It is the largest wheel you see when you open the back of most watches, lying directly at the end of the winding knob and shaft. In the center of the crown wheel is a very obvious, accessible screw. Loosen that screw a couple of half-turns and you disconnect the winding gears; you cannot wind the watch. The instant you tighten the crown-wheel screw you can wind the watch normally.

Just before entering each shop the investiga-

tors would loosen the crown-wheel screw. They would tell the watchmaker that the watch had recently been overhauled and was keeping good time until suddenly it refused to wind. They asked the watchmaker to "please fix it so it will wind again." Was this a fair test? It certainly must have been, for *228 repairmen detected the trouble at once, tightened the screw, and made no charge.* Some of these were not even watchmakers; some were assistants or youngsters. One, far from being a jeweler, was an itinerant knife-sharpener and repairman pulling a child's express wagon about San Antonio with soldering irons and crude tinkers' tools. He tightened the screw with a piece of razor blade.

CASE 391. *Portland, Oregon.* "The watchmaker's gone on a trip," I was told. "Neither of us are watchmakers." The two lads were in their late teens. "Look at it anyway," I told them, "maybe you can give me an idea what's wrong." One, still protesting he was no watchmaker, removed the back, got a screw driver, and tightened the screw. "That seems to be your trouble. No charge, of course."

CASE 53. *Annapolis, Maryland.* Only a girl was in the store. "The watchmaker's out for the day," she said. I asked her if she knew anything about watches. "Not much," she answered. "What is the matter with this one? How did it act when it went bad?" "Well, it started slipping a little, then more, until finally it wouldn't wind at all." "Then I do know your trouble isn't a mainspring," the girl said. "I do know that much about watches. Here, this wheel is loose. Maybe if I tighten this screw it'll be all right. There, that was the trouble, all right." I offered to pay her, but she wouldn't take any money. "We never charge for things like that—not ever," she said.

A clerk, not a watch expert, in a Charlotte, North Carolina, shop, performed the same task with speed and efficiency, refusing to make a charge. So did a woman assistant in Salisbury, Maryland; so did an eighteen-year-old apprentice in Austin, Minnesota. This case in Concord, New Hampshire, is exemplary:

CASE 512. This is a fine jewelry house, with a nice grade of merchandise carefully displayed.

Two men were employed. One, the watchmaker, said: "I could charge you $1.50 and tell you to come back in an hour or so, but we don't do business that way. You had a loose screw, that's all. It's like a clutch, and when you shifted, it wouldn't take hold and wind." There was no charge.

CASE 38. *New York City.* The watchmaker was working back at his bench, and I had to wend my way through a maze of furniture and bric-a-brac to get there. The old German opened the case quickly, squinted at it for the briefest of instants, then said: "If I vas crooked, I schwindle you goot. I sharge you ad leasdt two dollars, an' I say dot de shpindle is busted. But see here. I show you someding. I shurprise you. See, mit dis shcrew driver I joost tighten on dis shcrew. Now she's fixed. Vy should I schwindle people? Not for noding I got vatches from de schubway line, from de police. I don't sharge you noding. I get you next time."

So easily and quickly the honest and able repair people disposed of this elementary repair job. But others used the occasion to lay on the

charges for work they well knew was non-existent. Nor were all the gyps in back-alley shops; some of the most famous jewelry names outcharged the little fellows. In Philadelphia an established house asked $9.00; a similar place in Detroit wanted $5.00. The high cost of watch "repair" ran $4.00 in Dallas, $6.50 in New Orleans, $4.00 in Mobile, $4.50 in Denver and Cheyenne. In New York City a new watch without even the crown-wheel screw loosened was presented to a big Fifth Avenue jeweler—it drew a $10.00 estimate. This store has a big overhead and apparently tries to make it up on every customer.

The watchmakers know this condition exists. They will tell you so. They told the investigators so, as witness these cases:

CASE 90. *Lexington, Kentucky.* The jeweler tightened the screw and handed the watch back. No charge. "Better let me pay you, sir. I'd be glad to. Why, I suspect that some jewelers in the cities might have told me I needed a new mainspring." The watchmaker answered: "You wouldn't have had to go to a city. Some watch-

makers right here would put in a mainspring or say they did. I knew what was wrong with your watch the minute I turned the winding knob."

CASE 493. *Stamford, Connecticut.* This man charged nothing. He said: "I could have told you this would be a big job and had you leave the watch. But there's work enough to be done that's legitimate. The watch is all right now. There's no charge." When I mentioned the high estimate other watchmakers had given me and asked if maybe they hadn't seen the loose screw, he smiled: "Oh, they saw it all right, make no mistake."

CASE 470. *Cleveland, Ohio.* The watchmaker told me: "The winding mechanism is pretty well shot. It needs some new parts; the cost will be three dollars." I let him talk a little about how much work there was to my job, then I got out my screw driver, as I sometimes did, tightened the screw, and said: "Why the devil do you want to tell me all that hooey about $3.00 worth of work?" The fellow looked at me, saw I wasn't mad, and said, interestingly: "Well, I've been here less than two years. I started out by being

truthful and honest, but hell! The more honest you try to be the less the public believes you. You know what was wrong with your watch. But the ordinary customer doesn't. If I were to tell him the screw was loose and charge him a quarter, why, he wouldn't believe me. I've found you do a lot better in this business if you do like the rest of them—make the job sound as if it really amounted to something. Then they'll think you're a better watchmaker and have more respect for you. The customer judges the kind of job you do by the price you quote. I know what I'm talking about, because I've tried both ways."

An honest veteran in an upstairs shop in Topeka, Kansas, was fluent:

CASE 293. "Many watchmakers are crooked," he told me, "because the public doesn't know anything about their business. Whenever you find a trade that the public knows nothing about, you find a certain type of men going into that trade, men who deliberately set out to make money on the public's ignorance. If you sharpen a man's knife you can't cheat him—he knows if you do a good job. We aren't all gyps, though. I make a

good living, but I'd do better if the gyps didn't take the cream of the business. That's why I'm always willing to show up a careless or crooked watchmaker. I wish there were more customers like you going around with little tricks and showing up the crooks. It would help the whole trade."

One crooked repairman displayed the typical escapist alibi philosophy of his kind, blaming his own sins on a conventional handy goat:

CASE 183. *Canton, Mississippi.* "I can fix this for $1.50. But why do you have it fixed at all? Why not trade it off for a good watch you won't always be having trouble with?" "But I just had this one fixed," I told him. "Who fixed it? Somebody around here?" I told him that I thought it had been the Excel Company. "Oh, that damn Jew. What do you expect for your money from a sheeny like that? You know who's against 'em, don't you? You know who's going to chase the ——s out of business, don't you? Hitler! He's the man to do it."

Here I interposed: "Maybe I'd better go back to that watchmaker and have him fix it again."

"Hell, he'll find something else wrong. That guy's a crook. But I tell you what I'll do—*I'll* fix you up for a dollar."

As a matter of fact, Jew and Gentile gypped us equally.

Watchmakers who wish to do so can gyp the customer in a variety of ways, as we found out on our survey. The idea underlying every instance of swindling, however, is to pretend that there is much more work to be done than is really the case and to charge accordingly. In some shops that send out their repair work the "watchmakers" who interview the customers are spoken of in the trade as "take-in" men; they are salesmen who sell repairing by posing as watchmakers.

The ingenuity which dishonest watchmakers employed in attempts to manufacture repair business for themselves was startling.

CASE 50. *Washington, D.C.* "This watch won't wind," I said to a man whose face was principally nose—one of the largest noses I've ever encountered. The fellow expertly removed the back of the case, tightened the screw, and gave

the winder a couple of experimental clicks. Then he took his screw driver again and loosened the same screw. "You need a new winding spring," he told me. "It'll cost you $3.50." "What did you find with that screw driver?" I asked him. "Just checking to be sure I was right," he said. The watch was on a velvet pad in front of me. "Let's see the screw driver," I said, and before the fellow thought he'd handed it to me. "Let's see, you tightened this, didn't you, to check it?" Whereupon I tightened the screw and started winding the watch. "Why, it works all right now!" The guy's poise didn't leave him for a minute. "Oh yes, it seems to work. But there's serious trouble inside."

CASE 370. *San Francisco, California.* The watchmaker tightened the screw and said: "This watch is all out of order. It will cost $3.50 to fix it all up." "Does it wind now?" I asked. "It's all out of order," he replied. I said: "But I'm not worried so much about that. It didn't wind. That's what I asked you to fix. Does it wind now?" "I wound it," he told me, "but it isn't fixed. It'll go bad right away." I tried again, but

still he wouldn't tell me what was wrong. Nothing was, of course, except the loose screw.

CASE 147. *Miami, Florida.* A small shop. The owner said: "You got a stripped winding wheel —all the teeth are worn out. It'll cost a dollar to fix it." I asked him if he had the parts. For reply he took out a little box of winding wheels and compared several carefully with the wheel from my watch. Then with a neat hand-is-quicker-than-the-eye technique he put my old winding wheel back into the watch. I asked to see "my old wheel"; he handed me a rusty one that had never been in my watch. "This isn't mine—mine wasn't rusty like this," I said. Then I showed him how the design on the wheels now in my watch matched, proving that no change had been made at all.

Said one honest man in Norfolk, Virginia: "With a wrist watch, if you fling your arm suddenly to one side sometimes this little coil spring binds. Friction holds it there, and the watch won't run. You can fix it by simply tapping it; but crooked watchmakers will charge $2.50 to $5.00."

Four successive shops in Key West gave interesting results. Two said, "New mainspring, $2.00." The third, "I'll need two hours to find the trouble." The fourth, "The shipper spring is broken, $1.50." Our survey revealed that the gyps frequently run in local infestations, like boll weevil; the investigators struck four in succession in Milwaukee, in Omaha, in Council Bluffs, and in San Diego; five in New York, six in Denver and Chicago. On the other hand, we encountered one after the other, four good shops in San Antonio, five in Topeka, five in the smaller cities of Maryland, and twelve in North Carolina's Raleigh, Lexington, Charlotte, and Salisbury. One man's method of business seems to have an effect on his neighbor's.

Here are a few of the varying diagnoses the watchmakers made; the things they *said* our watches needed:

New pinion
New clutch spring
New click spring
New hairspring
New setting wheel
New balance staff
New winder
New ratchet
Winding stem broken
Winding wheel broken
Clutch lever broken
"Some pieces broke"

Loose pivot	Sleeve gone
Loose winding clutch	Threads stripped
Loose screw under crown	Screw missing
wheel	Clutch weak
Six loose screws	Wheels binding
A dozen loose screws	Oil gummed up
Shipper spring broken	Watch all out of order

In none of the 462 tests that form the basis for this chapter did any of the watches used by the investigators have any of these things wrong.

In Los Angeles, Patric, without revealing fully the nature of the survey, got into friendly argument with an old colleague of his *National Geographic* days, Francis Woodworth, now publicity man for the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce. Woodworth loyally insisted that local ethics were high.

"All right," said Patric, "you take an hour off tomorrow morning. Go to a few jewelers you pick at random. Get estimates on having this watch fixed. You don't know why it doesn't wind. If, after you've made four or five checks, you still think Los Angeles jewelers are all honest, I'll buy your lunch."

Woodworth went to three jewelers. Each told

him the mainspring was broken. One said the mainspring "and other things," and wanted $5.00.

In a small Oregon town one watchmaker accounted for the frequency of the "broken mainspring" diagnosis in this way:

CASE 389. An old established shop. The owner said: "You need a new mainspring. It will be $1.50." Later, in the course of a talk on how honest he was, he said: "It's my custom to charge for a mainspring anyway, even if it isn't broken. Yours really *is* broken, but lots of times you can't explain to customers just what's wrong because they wouldn't understand. But they all understand a mainspring."

When the investigators stopped to discuss the problem of mainsprings with the watchmakers they ran into a variety of contradictory statements.

CASE 486. *Wheeling, West Virginia.* "A dollar and a half. It's the *changes in the weather that break mainsprings.* There are two bad seasons for mainsprings, and this is one of them."

CASE 148. *Sarasota, Florida.* "Two dollars. You know they've offered $100,000 *to anyone who can tell why mainsprings break.* The Horological Association has offered it. The manufacturers want to find out. Three manufacturers each put up $10,000 to have men watch a mainspring until it broke. It was about ten o'clock on a spring day when it broke, but there wasn't a sound. They used to say it was thunderstorms, but it's a big mystery why they break."

CASE 298. *Holland, Michigan.* "We can give you two types of mainspring. One costs $1.50. The other is a much better type, *guaranteed* for one year, for $2.50.

CASE 225. *Chicago, Illinois.* "A dollar and a quarter for a new mainspring. *Mainsprings are never guaranteed.*" "But," I said, "your card says you guarantee all work." "Not mainsprings. But I tell you what I'll do, I'll put one in for $1.00."

A "guarantee" means little or nothing, as the jewelers admitted to our investigators. When they were trying to sell a job of repairing they played up the guarantee; but when the investi-

gator objected that a prior jeweler had guaranteed his repair job the salesman would explain, "Oh, he guaranteed only the part he repaired. He didn't guarantee the watch to run."

Plain and fancy gyppery alternated among the dishonest repairmen. Here are some typical instances:

CASE 405. *Pullman, Washington.* "This will cost $2.50. There's trouble down inside. It will be quite difficult to make this watch wind. It will take some new parts and a lot of work." I pressed for more details, and finally he said: "There's a tooth gone on the winding wheel. That's most of your trouble." "How much will you charge just for the wheel and let me put it in?" I asked him.

The fellow rose to his full height with an air of injured annoyance. "I suppose you want me to go to all the trouble of locating the right size wheel, grinding it to fit, perhaps, and then selling it to you cheap? We're watchmakers. What do you think we're in business for?" "Mister," I said, "I've heard your long lecture about how hard it is." I tightened the screw and wound the watch. His jaw dropped; he looked scared

as the dickens. There were other customers in the store. He said hoarsely, "Step over here a minute. Tell me what the idea is."

CASE 181. *Jackson, Mississippi.* "The trouble is your winding wheels; it'll cost $1.50." He then went into a rigmarole about wheels too high, wheels binding, worn teeth, copper washers, and stripped threads. "Let me see those threads," I said. "I do a little work on my car, and I know about stripped threads." "Well, if you know all about it, why do you come here?" I asked him for the wheel and the screw and his tweezers. "If you're a watchmaker, what did you come in here for?" "I'm not a watchmaker, sir. If I were, I'd fix it myself. I just want you to show me what you said was the trouble." "Take your watch and get out of here, you! I don't fix a watch for a damned inquisitive smart Aleck like you. I feel like taking a swing at you."

Other repair shops which the investigators visited displayed a liberal measure of incompetence along with their faulty diagnoses:

CASE 373. *San Francisco, California.* The young watchmaker told me: "Your clutch and pinion

are gone. This will cost you $2.50. You can have the watch tomorrow. We'll have to get the parts from the wholesale house, and it's too late to get them today." I remarked that another watchmaker had just repaired the watch and said: "I'll take it right back to him and tell him you say the clutch and pinion are broken." "Just wait a minute," the man said, very perturbed. "I haven't worked here long. Maybe we'd better let the master watchmaker look at this watch. Don't go. Wait a minute."

Gyp once, gyp twice. When our investigators made second visits to some shops they found a duplication of the results of the first visit—except in four instances when Patric received honest treatment and Miss May was cheated. Throughout the survey the man encounters crookedness in 46 per cent of his cases, the woman in 56 per cent. This follows the seemingly general rule among repairmen of all kinds: it is easier to deceive a woman. Here are two of Miss May's experiences in Chicago:

CASE 477. This large store had fixed a watch for Patric and made no charge. An elderly repair-

man said: "This needs a new balance staff and cleaning. The cost is $7.50." He had tightened the screw, then loosened it again before he gave the watch back to me.

CASE 480. A short, stout repairman said: "The cost of fixing this watch would be $5.00. It needs cleaning badly." This place fixed this same watch for Patric before without charge. The watch had been cleaned since then.

When the investigators had to have a watch brought back to perfect condition, after the manhandling it had received, they waited until they found a real watchmaker. One such, for fifty cents, did a job that a dishonest repairman had just asked $3.50 for.

Once in Chicago Patric inadvertently visited the same shop twice. The repairman produced a truly priceless diagnosis:

CASE 235. As soon as I got into this place I realized I'd been there before. But I pulled out the watch, and the fellow looked at it and then looked at me. "How much to fix this watch?" I asked. "You were here yesterday, weren't you?"

"Yes." "Well, I'll fix your watch for seventy-five cents." (The day before he had wanted $1.25 for a new mainspring.) "What's wrong with it?" I asked him now. "What did I tell you yesterday?" "I forget." "Well," he said, "the same thing is wrong with it today."

As in the other surveys we made, the big cities were less honest than the small ones. In the case of the watch repairmen the percentage of dishonesty ran at fifty-one in the big cities and thirty-eight in the towns under 10,000 population.

Watch-repair shops sometimes show certificates and seals of this or that society. We got the idea that these tended to be used chiefly as decorations, not necessarily as reliable guarantees of good work. One man in North Carolina told of the Carolina Watchmakers' Guild, saying its purpose is to establish reasonable and uniform prices. This watchmaker was honest. Another, in St. Augustine, Florida, displayed a diploma of the Horological Institute of America—but this repairman charged $1.50 for "adjusting the crown wheel." Pressed for details as

to how one adjusts a wheel, he admitted he had merely tightened it. One repairman we encountered uses the slogan, "Patronize Us with Confidence; We Originated Ethics in Watch Repairing"; then he asked $1.50 for a wholly unethical new mainspring.

Laws will not reform this condition any more readily than they reform other human habits. Wisconsin, land of much legislative experiment, has a board of watch examiners which issues certificates of registration for watchmakers. Yet Wisconsin was one of the bad states in the survey. In Milwaukee a "registered" jeweler wanted $2.00 for a new mainspring. In Madison this was duplicated. In Sauk Center the trouble was still diagnosed as the mainspring, but the cost was $1.25. Of sixteen watchmakers tested in that state nine lied. One of the Board of Examiners (who himself successfully passed our watch test) spoke frankly: "I know you are telling the truth," he said. "Those things take time. I've just been checking complaints myself around the state. We have improved things; we do clean up a bad case now and then. But we had to put a grandfather clause in our law, exempting from examination

all watchmakers who were in business before the law passed. I wish more people would do what you are doing. At least we try to keep new gyps from starting up."

What recourse has the citizen who has to have a watch repaired?

First of all, avoid need for repair as much as possible by taking good care of your watch. Wind it in the morning, not at night; that makes for more regular winding, and it means that the watch is lying quiet during the hours when its mainspring is running down. Don't overwind. Don't open the back; dust will get in. When you have to set your watch, pry up the knob with your fingernails, don't pull it out. Set it either forward or backward, it doesn't matter. If it's a wrist watch, take it off when you wash your hands.

Have it inspected and cleaned once a year by a reliable watchmaker. But how to find the reliable expert? Ask a number of friends for their experiences. If you are willing to put some effort into it, get several estimates on your repair job; be sure to listen closely to the diagnoses as well as the price. Demand detailed information. Get the watchmaker to write it down. If he can-

not specify, if he talks about "trouble you wouldn't understand, way down inside," go somewhere else.

Don't believe the "expert" who says cleaning a watch is a big job and will take several days. A good man cleans a watch in an hour, using twenty minutes for taking it apart and assembling it and forty minutes for the chemical baths, rinsing, and drying. A wrist watch gets dirty sooner than a pocket watch.

Don't patronize the shop which advertises "your watch repaired for $1.00" or for any other set price. That's like a surgeon advertising "I will perform any operation on you for $25." It can't be done. The most responsible watch men insist that the shop advertising an all-inclusive bargain price does little to your watch except maybe pick out a little dust.

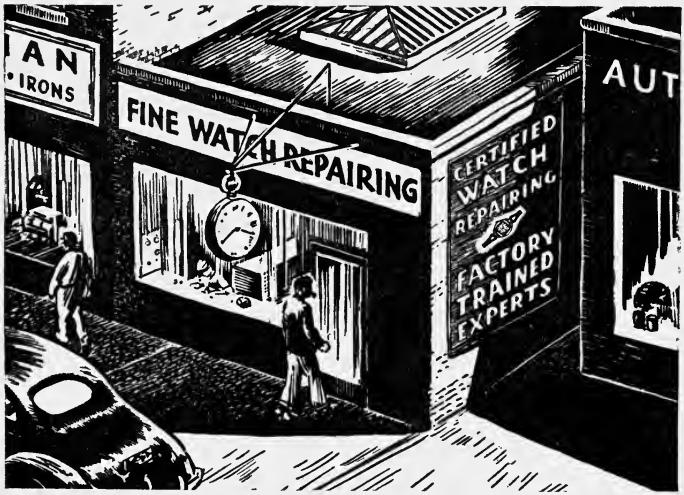
If you know a "time crank," a man who insists that his watch must run with split-second accuracy, ask him; he probably knows a good watchmaker.

Don't be impressed by the swank of a shop. Repairing as a business does not demand swank. Railroad watch inspectors are likely to be ca-

pable, though some may do these inspections only for their advertising value. A useful clue in finding a good shop is the number of watches hanging on the watch board for regulating. Observe that they are running—swinging slightly.

It is obviously impossible for people to learn enough about the complicated insides of a watch to protect themselves against their present ignorance. But you can protect yourself by insisting on specific diagnoses and on itemized bills. Don't be afraid to cross-examine and quiz.

After all, you know, it is *your* watch and *your* money.

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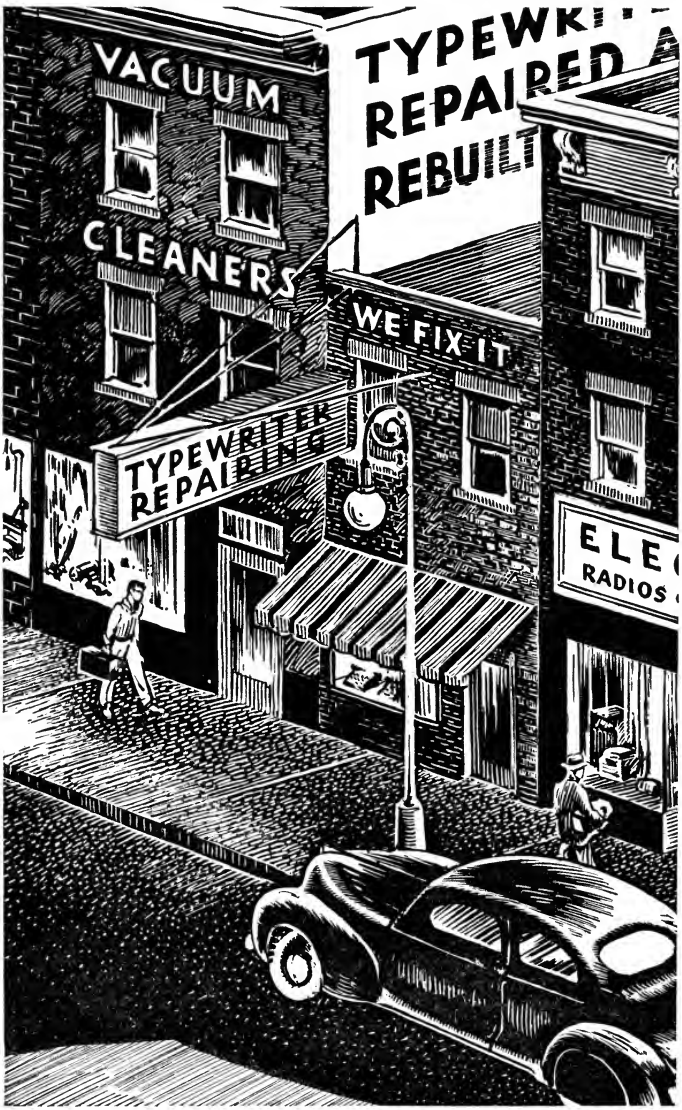

VACUUM
CLEANERS
TYPEWRITER
REPAIRING
WE FIX IT
REBUILT
RADIOS

6 *Typewriters*

THE TYPEWRITER is an essential modern machine which has won a place of universal dependence and trust. In homes, in offices, in schools, millions of them are used for the daily work of our highly literate nation.

In the business of repairing typewriters there is a condition of incompetence and dishonesty which is different from corresponding conditions in the repairing of autos, radios, watches, or

other mechanisms. It is different in that it is shot through chiefly with ignorance and bungling workmanship, and secondarily with overcharging and gyppery.

When our investigators, John Patric and Lioy May, took their guinea-pig typewriters, suffering from the simplest, most easily corrected defects, into 150 repair shops throughout the country, they *or the typewriters* were gypped in 98 instances. Two times out of three the repairman (1) overcharged, or (2) lied about his work in order to build up any charge at all, or (3) said the machine was "repaired" when actually it was in worse condition than before.

Of these three sins of commission the last-named proved the most serious. So harshly did these "repair" men treat the typewriters that the investigators found it necessary to keep one, for actual use in writing their reports, away from the shops, never submitting it to any so-called experts. They were forced, too, to buy two more new machines while on the road; the two they started with were soon virtually wrecked —in the name of adjustment, overhaul, and repair.

CASE 39. *Savannah, Georgia.* Typewriter X is now in awful shape again. It will write, but that is about all. The spring tension is too tight, the letters pile up, the machine skips. I cannot write accurately.

CASE 126. *Portland, Oregon.* Our notes have referred constantly to the difficulty we are having with the typewriters. They are persistently being put into bad order. It has got so with one typewriter that we hate to take it to any shop.

CASE 194. *Las Vegas, Nevada.* A medium-sized shop gave me a bill for $1.50 for "repairing portable, inspection and adjustment, checked and tightened." This typewriter is now so bad we expect to pick up another one.

When our findings in the auto repair industry were published, some critics remarked that it would be impossible to keep a car in first-rate condition during thousands of miles of driving. But careful preventive service kept the car performing at peak efficiency all the way. And similarly, in the typewriter survey, the investigators nineteen times went to the branches or

authorized stations of the big national typewriter manufacturers and had them restore the machines to proper condition.

But this fact stands out, painfully obvious: if you take a new radio, or watch, or typewriter, or a car in first-rate shape, and submit it to the tender ministrations of repairmen, your chief job at once becomes the keeping of that test article in halfway decent condition. *The typewriters, in this survey, gave no trouble of their own accord; they had all their trouble visited upon them by the repairmen.*

A manufacturer's branch in Columbia, South Carolina, repaired the machine. "What have you been doing to it?" the mechanic demanded. "Somebody's been trying to fix this without proper tools. Everything is out of adjustment. We usually give free service on little things, but if I fixed this right I'd have to charge you. Be careful where you take this typewriter. Every adjusting nut on it has been chewed to pieces by somebody who uses a big old pair of pliers instead of the proper wrenches. Some of these nuts can't be tightened any more, they're so jammed up. Men who do that aren't typewriter

men at all. They know people are ignorant about the machines and know they can get by with anything."

Was our test, the problem we placed before the shops, a fair one? On one typewriter the investigators loosened a nut underneath which stopped the machine from writing. To "repair" this called for a small wrench and five seconds of time. On another they lifted off, with the fingers, a wire link underneath which disconnected the ribbon feed. To "repair" this called for ten seconds' use of the fingers only. On a third they slipped the connections and lifted the roller, or platen, out of its groove so that it tipped up unevenly. Any typist could "repair" this, without any tools, in five seconds.

Fifty-two shops tackled these elementary problems successfully; twenty-nine of those charged nothing.

CASE 98. *Palm Springs, California.* I took the machine into a photo shop to ask where I could get it fixed. The proprietor said, "What's wrong? Maybe I could fix it." "Are you a typewriter man?" I asked. "No. But I fix my own some-

times. I used to be a Hollywood cameraman, and on location we had to fix our own cameras. Mechanical principles are the same in all mechanical devices. Here, this is your trouble, this loose link. It hooks on somewhere. There, that ought to do it. No, you don't owe me anything for a little accommodation like that."

CASE 118. *Oakland, California.* The mechanic was extremely courteous. "How much do I owe you?" "Nothing. All I had to do was slip a wire link back on."

CASE 113. *San Francisco, California.* "There wasn't anything wrong with your typewriter. A little wire that lifts the ribbon had just come unhooked. We hate to charge for such simple jobs, but we've got a big overhead, and we can't always let them go out for nothing. I guess we'll call it square for fifty cents."

The problem was simple and fair enough, as simple and fair as tightening a loose screw in a door hinge. And here are some of the field reports of what happened. They happened, as in all fields we have studied, more often to the

woman than to the man; he was gypped six out of ten times, she seven out of ten.

CASE 8. *Baltimore, Maryland.* This large office supply house (a factory branch) told me they couldn't fix the machine for two hours. When I returned I was told, "The brackets and all the underparts were bent." He gave me a bill for $1.50, reading, "escapement dog," "operating links and lever bent and loose." When I insisted that he show me on the machine what had been wrong, he said, "It's pretty technical for you to understand, and it would be hard to show you."

This "too technical" alibi occurred four times among the typewriter gyps as well as many times among the radio and watch gyps. Another thing: these men hate to do any work in front of the customer; the worst gyps usually get the customer out of the way even before making an examination.

CASE 17. *New Rochelle, New York.* "Come back in an hour and I'll give you an estimate." And when I returned, "We can't do the necessary work on the machine till tomorrow afternoon. It

may be quite a job." I told him I couldn't leave the typewriter. He quickly opened the case and took from the platen a piece of paper which he crumpled in his hand. I saw he had typed an even line of letters, something that could not be done when I brought the machine in. "You've found my trouble, then," I said happily. "No," he replied, fussed, "we wrote those letters by moving the carriage at each letter." What had happened was that he had found and tightened the loose screw, written a line, loosened the screw again, and forgot to remove his test sheet.

CASE 19. *New York City.* "This machine," I said, "won't write. The only thing I can see that might be wrong is this loose nut. Do you suppose that's the trouble?" Without tightening the nut to try it, he said, "Can you leave it for a couple of hours and I'll give it a check?" When I returned he charged me $1.50. "That loose nut had something to do with it but not much. Your trouble was a piece of dirt lodged in the escapement. You aren't paying for the removal of the dirt or tightening the nut but for my skill in finding that piece of dirt." Of course there was no piece of dirt.

Six times, like that, Patric pointed out the loose nut to the repairman. All six denied that the nut was the cause of the difficulty.

By their acts you can get a fair line on their standing as repairmen. Here are three successive clear cases, all in Minneapolis, occurring at 2:30 P.M. June 11, 9:45 A.M. June 12, and 2 P.M. June 12. Within twenty-four hours these three shops gypped the investigators out of $6.10. Note, too, the evasion of the insistent request for the old parts, supposedly replaced. This request naturally is an active irritant to repairmen who have replaced nothing. These cases happened to the woman, using the machine with the platen askew.

CASE 166. *Minneapolis, Minnesota.* "You needed new variable parts. We put them in and adjusted the machine. It works all right now. The charge is $1.35 for parts and $1.00 for labor." "Give me a receipt, please, and I'd like the old parts." "They were thrown out with the trash." "Will you please get them for me?" "We couldn't. They were too small. That trash has been thrown out." "Then please write on the receipt 'old parts thrown away.'" "We won't do it." "Why? I

paid for the new ones." "We won't do it. We haven't had a customer like you in twenty years. Come back tomorrow; we'll try to find them." But when I went back the next day they said they couldn't find them.

CASE 167. *Minneapolis, Minnesota.* When I returned to this typical shop my bill was $1.25. They said "we adjusted the escapement and fixed the platen," and they had no hesitancy about writing this on the bill. This same typewriter is now certainly supposed to be in good repair.

CASE 168. *Minneapolis, Minnesota.* It looks as if this out-of-place platen, which any stenographer could fix for herself, reveals that the customer is a sucker. The head mechanic said the bill was $2.50. "We adjusted the moving carriage, adjusted the tabulator, and checked it in general."

In Laredo, Texas, the request for the old parts resulted in this:

CASE 86. "Your machine's finished. I had to put in a couple of new parts—$1.35." "Fine, may I have the old parts?" The fellow looked around.

"Guess they must be lost." "Lost! How could that be? You just replaced them ten minutes ago." He looked some more; and when I returned to the shop he said, "I looked high and low for the bumper, but I can't find it." "Bumper?" I asked. "You spoke of parts, not part. What was the other?" "I didn't say 'parts,' I said 'part,' and we can't find it. Musta threw it out."

On one of the machines, as has been said, the test was the simple lifting off of a wire link. This link is made by the factory with a certain bend in it, and it caused the bungling mechanics no end of trouble and confusion. One man replaced it so that it fouled other parts and the typewriter would not write capitals. Others forced it back so roughly as to disarrange adjacent mechanisms. Still others bent and twisted it hopelessly out of shape and out of correct functioning.

CASE 128. *Seattle, Washington.* "Your ribbon link was pretty badly bent and we had to straighten it out." "Will you show me?" He did. Again the link was badly messed up by a mechanic who hadn't the slightest idea how to hook

it up. I couldn't help showing my annoyance, for this means another trip to a factory branch. "For gosh sakes, if you had to bend it all wrong, why didn't you just leave it as it was and say you didn't know how to fix it?" "But it *was* all bent out of shape." "Oh, my gosh, it *wasn't!* That bichrome link is supposed to have a bend in it, it's a factory bend, and the link slips on and off with the fingers when you throw the key on the stencil position. Write me out a receipt." "No, I don't want your money. But don't you come in here again to get anything fixed!"

A man in Lewiston, Idaho, who had charged only fifty cents for "straightening connecting link and some other things down underneath," refused to give any receipt for the job. This was a brand-new typewriter. At first he said he "had to take off quite a few parts to reach the trouble." Asked for a detailed receipt, he said, "Oh, such a little job, I guess we won't charge this time."

The question of prices charged turns up surprising angles. The investigators ran into several indications of local price agreements among the merchants of typewriter repair.

CASE 162. *Cleveland, Ohio.* The bill for "adjusting escapement, replacing two wires, and adjusting the ribbon movement" was $1.50. I had to insist several times that the receipt include all those items and then said, "Why do you find it necessary to lie so?" They got pretty mad, and the manager said, "I'll tell *you* something. The typewriter association here has a minimum charge of $1.50 to fix *anything* on *any* typewriter."

Yet the next shop in Cleveland asked fifty cents. This man, incidentally, was unable to replace the link, and when Patric showed him how simple it was he exclaimed angrily, "I don't like a fellow to come in here and make a fool out of me. Get out and don't come back."

In San Francisco one shop asked $1.00 and admitted the job would take only five minutes. "A dollar is the minimum charge all over the city. It's trade custom." The next shop, which did a good job on the machine, remarked, "They tried to get us to charge a minimum, but I've been in this business thirty years. You can't build good will that way. Typewriters aren't much different

from fifteen years ago, and I've never yet seen a typewriter that has worn out."

"A dollar and a half is the minimum all over this city," said a man in Chicago. "We do have a minimum charge of $1.00," said another in Memphis, "but for anything as simple as this we really couldn't charge anything."

In Albuquerque, New Mexico (Case 97), a clerk insisted that the minimum charge was $1.25, "but we are making this job seventy-five cents; it was quite a job." I said, "Rubbish," and in ten seconds disconnected the link and in ten more put it back. "Now wasn't that all there was to it?" "Under the circumstances," said the manager of the store, "there should be no charge at all. There is a usual $1.25 minimum by sort of agreement among typewriter men."

Confronted with their gyppery, the dishonest men went through sundry contortions.

CASE 177. *Trenton, New Jersey.* This small shop charged seventy-five cents for putting in a "new ribbon link" but of course could not find "the old one." So I asked the fellow why he lied.

"Well, hell, our minimum price is seventy-five cents. I could find that broken link, but my time is worth $1.25 an hour and I'm not going out there looking for any link." "All right, I'll give you $2.00 if you find that broken link." "You get out of here and stay out. I don't want customers like you." Finally he offered me the seventy-five cents back, but I preferred to keep the lying receipt.

A bungler in Portland, Oregon (Case 123), tried vainly with pliers to hook up the link, not realizing that he had to put the machine on stencil to do so. Then he announced the link was bent, and he would have to "correct" it.

I knew what that meant, so I stopped him and showed how easily the link is replaced with the fingers. "Well," he said defensively, "I knew what was wrong, didn't I? Shouldn't I get paid for what took so long for me to learn?" "Sure you should. Here's your fifty cents." "Oh, I don't mean from you, I mean from the ordinary customer who doesn't know anything about typewriters." "You mean the more ignorant a customer is the more he ought to pay?" "Why—er—

no, not at all. But you take doctors, they charge $5.00, and don't do anything."

Said one in Bismarck, North Dakota, defending his unnecessary tale of elaborate repairs, "You can't make any job sound too simple, it's bad business."

And in Memphis a guilty repairman gave still another excuse for his admitted attempt to gyp.

CASE 62. "Your ribbon link was disconnected. It's necessary to take the whole back off the machine and remove the carriage to get it back—$1.25." So I threw the machine to stencil and removed the link. "Now she's loose," I said, "as she was when I brought her in. Watch carefully." With my fingers I quickly put the link back. "Now she's fixed, in half a jiffy, without taking off the back, without removing the carriage, without tools. No sir, I don't quarrel with you if you charge me $1.25 and say the job took only a minute; but I do object to the story about taking off the back and the carriage. Write me a receipt just that way." "We won't take your money on that basis. To be frank, I'm not familiar with this machine. *But we have a tremendous*

overhead; we pay more than $600 a year in taxes and we have to get that back some way."

In New Orleans an honest repairman estimated that not 4 per cent of the typewriter mechanics knew their business in that city. In Portland, Oregon, evidence partly supporting that comment showed when a clerk stated that the airplane companies were drawing off the best typewriter men for training in assembling carburetors. "Why should we work for $30 a week when we can get up to $50 in plane factories?"

Before the actual survey commenced Patric took one machine, in perfectly good condition, to three different shops with the request that they overhaul it and put it in good shape. The first charged $1.50, the second $1.60, and the third $1.50; one spoke of "correcting a bad shift," another poured on so much oil that it dripped for days afterward. It is impossible to say whether these men were chiefly dishonest or whether they were chiefly incapable. They were certainly unsatisfactory as repairmen. If the first one did a good job, the second and third were obviously dishonest; if the third man was honest, the first

two were obviously incapable. Their own work convicts two out of these three.

Insofar as there are able mechanics in this field, they appear to be most numerous in the local factory branches or accredited agents of the big manufacturers. In typewriter repairing the difference between the small independent and the factory agent runs, on our evidence, in favor of the factory agent. The independents averaged 70 per cent incapable or dishonest, the factory representatives 37 per cent. The accredited agents markedly tended to repair the machine and charge nothing or very little and to do good work. A few were gyps; one in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, refused to give a receipt on the letterhead of the company he represented, saying he was not allowed to use the letterhead "for that purpose." But another, honest, in Spokane, informed us that his company wanted no profit on the service department and gave bonuses if it broke even.

In typewriter repairing honesty seems to pay; the honest shops prosper and are large and well-equipped.

What constructive suggestion arises out of this

research? It is obviously pointless to urge people to know more about their typewriters, because they simply won't bother to take the time. It will help, obviously, to insist on return of the used parts allegedly replaced; it will help to insist on receipted bills detailed on company stationery. Unhappily, to be skeptical and demand reasons always seems to help. But beyond those warnings our investigators, for their own benefit, are determined to take their typewriters for repair to the accredited representative of the manufacturer.

It is the manufacturers to whom we should look, in the last analysis, for the curing of these ills.

First and last drawings in a cartoon strip by Walt Disney, reproduced from autographed originals. Donald Duck lives in Hollywood—where we encountered America's most ambitious gyps. Donald's itemized bill is two feet long. We had five in a row, $25 each for a fifty-cent job.

7 *Vacuum Cleaners and Electric Irons*

IN THE COURSE of our sampling of the country's repair shops we made an attempt to test the reliability and honesty of the men servicing vacuum cleaners and electric irons. Nominally, the survey resulted in visits to 141 shops which handle one or the other type of these appliances. The general trend of our tests seems to show that the repairmen in these two industries, with much closer ties to the manufacturers, are the more re-

liable for it. Practically a number of factors combined to prevent us from drawing the definite conclusions which we were able to draw from the other surveys.

In general, the shops that do repair work on these two appliances are of a better grade and have less interest in getting profits out of repair work as such. They are often well-established electrical stores, or local power company offices, or agents of the manufacturers. Many shops, we found, service only the make of iron or vacuum cleaner which they sell. In this situation they have a greater incentive to do honest, capable work.

In nearly a quarter of the 141 shops we visited we were referred to another repair shop, or we were told to send the appliance in to the manufacturer for repairs, or the repairman was out on a job, or the shop wouldn't service our brand of electric iron or vacuum cleaner. These frequent cases in which no actual test was forthcoming cut down the scope of our investigation in this field considerably.

Unsatisfactory also were the only fair methods we could devise of decommissioning the elec-

tric iron and the vacuum cleaner. In the case of the iron, the trouble was that it wouldn't always stay decommissioned. What we had done to create a simply located defect was to disconnect a wire in the plug. To make things look realistic we had then shorted the wires across the post of a storage battery so that the end of the wire had fused a little, as wires do when they become very hot when a few strands carry the whole load. The investigators would leave the iron at repair shops with the story that "it heats spasmodically," which would be true. This method yielded a number of clear-cut tests. But many times, when the cord was turned and twisted, the disconnected wire, though loose, would make contact. Thus many repairmen, finding the iron heated all right, would not bother to take the plug apart and would merely tell the investigators that "it must be your socket at home." But we made enough tests to convince us that here the honest repairmen outnumbered the gyps.

The vaccum-cleaner test consisted of simply rolling the belt off the drive wheel, so that the machine ran and sucked air but picked up little dirt. Of the eighty vacuum-cleaner shops we

visited about half handled the problem instantly and reasonably; a quarter of them did not, either charging exorbitantly or telling tall stories; and another fourth did not get around to looking at the machine at all, either telling us that they handled only one make or that we should send it to a power company. These somewhat inconclusive returns appear to rate the repairmen in these fields considerably above the average.

Unlike the auto investigation, which revealed that large and impressive garages were less honest than the small repair shops, we found the situation here somewhat different. We were seldom gypped by the big merchandisers.

A good reason as to why the power and electric companies tend to give capable if somewhat inaccessible service was put forth by one repairman in Wheeling, West Virginia, to whom we took our "decommissioned" electric iron. He told us: "Take it to the electric company, they'll fix it free, probably give you a cord if you need one. Those electric irons take more juice than a cleaner, a washing machine, a radio, and a lot of lights all put together. They use *juice,* irons do. So the electric companies like to keep 'em

running. Take it over there. We can't compete with 'em, so we don't." Many of the manufacturers' agents in these two fields appeared to be much more responsible than similar agents in other fields. Possibly the bond between agent and manufacturer is stronger and closer here than anywhere else.

In one respect did the repairmen in these fields notably revert to type. When cases of gyppery did crop up, it was much more likely to happen to the woman investigator. In Trinidad, Colorado, a vacuum-cleaner repairman charged her $1.53 for "repairs inside the pipe." In Salt Lake City another charged her $4.50 for "service." But in general, with these two appliances, the verdict was more apt to be: (Savannah, Georgia.) "No, I'm sorry, we usually send those jobs to the Savannah Electric and Power Company, but they usually want a week to do any kind of repair job." (Spokane, Washington.) "It was a simple job, all fixed now; just twenty-five cents." (Springfield, Illinois.) "Your belt was off—that was all that was wrong—no charge for that." (Cheyenne, Wyoming.) "Sorry, but we don't repair any other make but our own." (Lex-

ington, North Carolina.) "Lady, we've tested this iron. It's still very hot. It doesn't seem to have a thing wrong with it. See if your socket is all right in your home."

The factor of time comes into these two surveys. The vacuum cleaner is a big thing to carry around, and it took the investigators two or three times as long to park, leave the "prop," call back, etc., as it did to make the more important car checks. Similarly, it was difficult to get immediate service on both the cleaner and the electric iron. The time factor played some part in reducing the scope of these surveys. The fact that these were simpler mechanisms than cars, radios, or watches—harder to gyp you on, for that reason—undoubtedly played a part. But the lack of sweep and conclusiveness notwithstanding, these surveys seemed to give an indication, at least, that the closer the repairman and the manufacturer are bound together, the more honest and capable will the service be in that industry.



8 *What Is Your Experience?*

INTO THE WILD CONTROVERSY which followed instantly upon the first appearance of the repairman stories both the general reading public and repairmen themselves plunged with abandon. The trades covered by our investigation have set up angry howls of protest. But their brickbats were offset by an extraordinary avalanche of bouquets, corroboration, and thoughtful comments from the vast majority of the general pub-

lic. *"A fine piece of work."* . . . *"It will save motorists millions."* . . . *"My experience is identical."* . . . *"You didn't go far enough."* . . . *"The exposure was long overdue."* Thus car owners by the hundreds voice their approval.

Many even go the investigators one better with repairman experiences of their own:

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. A garageman said it would cost $40 to fix my starter. I waited until I got home. My neighborhood mechanic found only a broken wire, which he soldered for fifty cents.

Milton, New York. I stalled my car on the streets of New York City and paid $22 for new spark plugs, condensers, and I don't know what all. Back in Milton, my own auto service looked the car over and found the only darn thing they'd done was to install a new battery cable.

Shreveport, Louisiana. The battery company I asked to test the efficiency of my carburetor and ignition had their exhaust analyzer *set to register poor results.*

Brooklyn, New York. My car was in the shop when the story came out, so I was wary. I paid the bill, $9.60, had it itemized, then consulted two other

mechanics. Both said the job had never been done at all. In the end the big company the first man was operating under made him return my money.

And many more automobile owners continue this same theme with comments such as: "My experience has paralleled this test for years." . . . "I have found plenty of the things you have described."

This letter from a housewife indicates that repairmen have something tangible to gain in offering honest service:

If repairmen would only realize that if they reduce their prices and provide honest work their trade would increase substantially.

Were it not for experiences I have had, I would take to the repair shop two watches, a drink mixer, a radiant heater, a small radio. All have some small defect, but my lean purse can't stand the cost of repair plus the risk that the things probably won't work very long after being fixed. So I put the articles away on the shelf until that future date when I win a soap contest and can afford to have everything repaired.

Now I'm just an ordinary consumer. I questioned twenty of my friends about this matter. Every single

one had at least *two* articles they were withholding from repair for the same reason as I. A very general comment was: "It's cheaper to buy a new one than have the used one repaired."

Now multiply me and my friends by all the people in the country who must have similar instances. The repairmen would be snowed under with work if they would *prove* to the customer that he can get efficient work at a fair price.

Proof that the general idea is being put to practical use continues to pour in from all parts of the country. Says a Connecticut garageman: "Dozens of customers have asked for their old parts. They never did before." A Minnesota instructor in auto mechanics writes: "I am using your set of rules to give to friends who ask my advice about repairs on vacation treks." The managing editor of a Pittsburgh newspaper says that many car dealers, while upset by the first article, had service departments put up signs: "Used Parts Returned"; "Our Charges Are Itemized," etc.

An automotive editor in Detroit writes:

If you, in your story, did nothing more for the automobile business than to allow us, who live in this

business, to make use of your story to point out to the average car dealer that there was money in rendering proper service and treating their customers right, your story was worth all of the time, effort, and expense entailed in preparing it. The industry should give you a universal vote of thanks for arousing thousands of dealers out of the lethargy of self-complacency caused by an over-prosperous car model year.

As the answer to "recent charges of racketeering in repair work" Consolidated Edison is considering a plan to establish a separate company which would handle the repair and maintenance of electrical appliances, with standard prices and supervised, tested, and certified work.

Not all agree with the substance of the stories. From Chicago, Illinois:

For childish gullibility it seems to me the program of your two infants is about tops. All through their journey they advertise themselves as "suckers." Take your car to the proper place, treat the mechanics fairly, and *act* like you're *not* a sucker, even though you may be one, and you'll find the average garageman as fair and square a man to deal with as the

average in most other professions . . . at least such has been my experience.

A minister most interestingly writes from Fitchburg, Massachusetts:

I read with interest the article on dishonest garagemen—with double interest, in fact, since my experience has been so different. I do not question the fairness of your test nor the validity of the conclusions, but I do question the adequacy of the seven suggestions to meet the situation. For these suggestions, when tried alone, are the very things to breed the dishonesty which you are exposing.

I have driven well over a quarter of a million miles. You can imagine that the get-out-and-get-under command is an old one with me. But I am no more mechanical than the proverbial woman and, hence, am at the mercy of any and every garageman.

They have treated me regally, but not because I have watched them, or asked them for itemized bills, or the return of my used parts, but because they have become friends. While a man is working on my car I tell him about my family, he tells me about his. I seldom reveal that I am a minister, because I despise patronage on this account, but I find that nine times out of ten the repairmen warm up to friendship.

It would be pretty small of a man to act friendly in order to be treated white. But when a fellow naturally sees in every garageman a friend and a human being with dreams and hopes and fears like other men, then the best and not the base in that man comes to the surface. Suspicion breeds fear and anger, and these release the worst in a man. Friendship draws out the finer qualities.

Of course there are exceptions. In downtown Boston snow plows walled me in with five-foot banks of snow last winter. I paid $5.00 for a garageman who took twenty minutes to tow me out. But the next time I am in that section of the city I shall go in there to buy some gas and pick up the conversation where we left off. He may become my friend yet, and a remorseful conscience may begin to work, and possibly some besnowed autoists will not be asked quite so much next winter. Who knows?

A few readers sat down and directed blasts against us that were as wrathful as this one from Atlanta, Georgia:

I find I've been gypped, brother, and in the worst way. It took this malicious editorial on a subject with which I am thoroughly informed to open my poor deluded eyes. I had not the remotest sus-

picion that you were a bunch of communists who take advantage of your position to publicly knock and falsely create a mistrust of your fellow Americans. What is the purpose of this wholly unsound and UN-AMERICAN piece of BALLYHOO? Are you trying to start a war of your own by insulting human intelligence and good old AMERICAN integrity?

There are quite a few smart-alecks among us like your investigators . . . they deserve a good gypping that they, too, seldom get. I resent heartily and healthily any poor misled mortal who spends his worthless time in such unsound investigation.

On the other hand, here is a letter from Oak Park, Illinois, which is more typical of the great majority of the vast correspondence we are receiving concerning the repairman survey.

Congratulations. It is good to know that at last someone is willing to champion the people's cause against the "gyp" element of the business world. *Unwittingly these business people are bringing about the kind of governmental restrictions on private enterprise which they all abhor.* Perhaps your articles will help them to clean up their own house, but at any rate they will serve to show the people some of

the evils lurking behind the gaudy illuminated signs of our respected business streets.

Cincinnati, Ohio. Since reading your "Will Gyp You" articles we have turned into skeptical customers.

We had a smashed fender. A large repair shop wanted $12.50. A smaller one did the job in a first-class manner for $6.50.

A radio repairman insisted our car radio needed a new speaker and a condenser at $12. An honest fellow fixed it up for $1.30.

You saved us $16.70, here in Cincinnati. Thanks.

From Grand Rapids, Michigan, a minister writes:

Recently many things you revealed in your radio story were verified. Our Public Address System needed repairs. One repairman was certain that the transformer, tube, fuse, and perhaps a few condensers were burned out. His estimate was nothing less than $10 nor more than $13.

When we heard this man talk, your article was vividly recalled. It was your article that influenced our decision, and we sought another repairman. The

second repairman did the job for $4.58. Only a condenser was burned out. Thanks to you, we were not gypped.

New York. Our radio went bad. It was a big one, but my husband loaded it into our car and took it to a radio shop up beyond 200th Street. The man took out all the eight tubes, tested them on his tube tester, and said seven were bad. My husband said: "If I hadn't read that story, I'd have bought those seven tubes. But now I'll be darned if I will." Later he had the tubes tested at Macy's. Only two were bad. I bought two new tubes at seventy-five cents each—less than the radio shop wanted—and it's been playing fine ever since."

Cleveland, Ohio. That radio story saved me $7.70. I've got an expensive portable, and it didn't play. I took it to a shop here in Cleveland, and they wanted $10 to fix it. Having read that story, and having suspicioned radio shops for a long time, I didn't leave it. I remembered that the investigators had received more honest treatment in small shops, so when I passed through a little town on my vacation a couple of weeks later I took my radio to a shop there. I told them: "I ought to have had this radio fixed

in Cleveland, but I mistrusted the shop. I haven't been in this town long, but I've heard *you* could be trusted." When I picked up the radio on the way back the bill was just $2.30.

Many readers went on to suggest other fields which in their opinion could stand investigation. A doctor in Honolulu writes:

Congratulations! Your cases could be multiplied by the dozens among my friends. It is a most pleasing trend of investigation. I wish to suggest that you carry it further, including various types of doctors, dentists, druggists, and beauty parlors. Maybe you will scare some into being reasonably honest for a time.

Requests that we investigate doctors far outnumber all others. Says a Wyoming serviceman: "Unfortunately we garagemen that make errors must live with them or live them down. A doctor buries his." Repeatedly we were asked to extend our investigation into these fields among others:

Refrigeration repairmen
Magazine editorial staffs and writers
Sewing-machine repairmen
Spiritualistic mediums
Fur repair
Real estate

Chauffeurs	Painters
Pharmacists	Butchers
Union labor	Shoemakers
Auto finance	Cake mixers
Hearing devices	Bankers
Welders	Lawyers
Electricians	Publishers

A Minneapolis housewife writes in:

Your courage amazes me. Everyone knows we are a nation of goats that resigns itself to its evil, avoids repairs to the danger point, finally calls a repairman and then moans. F'gosh sakes, expose plumbers. They may be funny in cartoons, but I've never seen the humor since I paid fifteen dollars to have a sink raised seven inches.

Newspapers all over the country reprinted the repairman stories, and dozens of them had penetrating editorial comment to make on the subject. Said the New York *Times:* "A shocking lack of ethics in a number of garages and repair stations in different sections of the country is revealed—performs a real service for motorists. It might be suggested that fewer motorists would be victimized if they knew a little more about

the workings of the cars they drive. Best of all would be the spread of a little elementary honesty to the repair stations which now lack it."

The Duluth *News-Tribune* commented: "This muckraking of mechanical graft may have a good effect, and it would be well for the two trades attacked to do less howling and more housecleaning. No auto or radio owner who has had to have repairs made doubts that there is much truth in the exposé, but it should be repeated that the whole trade should not be spattered with the mud that is thrown. Few lines of business, taken as a whole, are even candidates for, much less entitled to, halos."

An editorial in the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* said: "The . . . article, by calling attention to the tricks employed, should help in putting the public on the alert and also in discouraging the cheats. It would be a valuable service, however, if honest repairmen could contrive some means of policing their industry. Automobile manufacturers also have a stake in trying to clean up this situation, since the public's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their product depends to a large extent on the mechanics who service it."

From the Joplin, Missouri, *Globe:* "There are honest automobile repairmen. Any number of them. And the ones who are honest will be glad to have the unscrupulous and dishonest members of their craft castigated."

There have been some complaints from the general public, many more from the men in the trade, that the number of tests the investigators made was "too absurdly small" to warrant such sweeping conclusions. An advertising man in Rosemont, Pennsylvania, says: "This is one of the worst surveys I have ever seen—only 347 out of 200,000. How was the sampling made?" We can assure him that repair shops were chosen at random, just as they would be picked by any stranger whose car suddenly breaks down and who fears to drive it farther. And we might remind him that Dr. Gallup can predict the political heartbeat of 50,000,000 American voters by feeling the pulse of what is, comparatively, an even smaller sample. Critics of the survey might note that no one in the United States has made any other similar investigation or advanced any other proved facts and figures in refutation. During the summer the Montreal *Standard* con-

ducted a similar investigation in Canadian garages. Of forty-two tested, twenty-two were found to be gyps.

The ideal survey, of course, would have been one that covered *all* of this country's repair shops. Ours was admittedly a sampling. But indirectly we are getting a wider and wider survey all the time: through the comments of the American motorists who have written by the hundreds, through the letters of radio owners and of watch owners. So overwhelmingly in our favor has been the corroboratory evidence which they submit that our original sampling of repair-shop ethics takes on new and added significance as time goes on.

Many readers find it impossible to accept the percentages of gyppery which the investigators found. Some offer their own guesses. Here are some in the case of the automobile survey, reading from black to white:

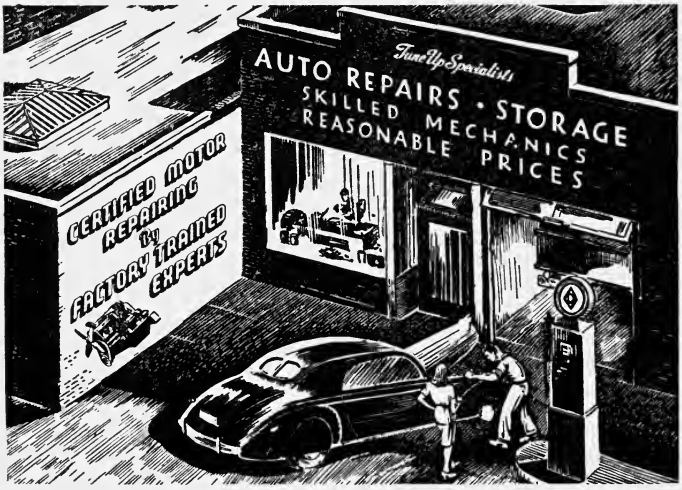
Percentage of Gyppery Estimated	
90 per cent	Garageman in Yonkers, New York: Nine out of ten will gyp you —but not around here.

80 per cent	Shop foreman in Mt. Kisco, New York: Conservative. It's four out of every five.
60 per cent	Car dealer in Sioux City, Iowa: Three out of every five.
37 per cent	Reader in Paoli, Pennsylvania: Less than 37 per cent are dishonest.
10 per cent	Parts wholesaler, Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania: Not ten per cent in our area overcharge.
0 per cent	Automotive editor, Detroit, Michigan: Automobile mechanics are a guileless, wholly honest class of citizens.

If you don't like our figure of 63 per cent, here are plenty of alternatives!

As a result of our experience, we advised car owners to seek out small garages in little towns for honest service. Several correspondents take issue with that advice. Says a Philadelphian: "The greasy mechanic with only a screw driver and a pair of pliers is as outmoded on modern cars as a witch doctor." To this we reply that while honesty also seems outmoded, there is definitely more of it in the small shops.

Obviously, as many correspondents insist, "all the crooks are not in the automobile business," or the radio business, or the watchmaking business. Here are conditions which go deeper than the competition or economics or temptations of any particular trade. Over and over again readers ask: "What would similar surveys reveal in other lines of business?" A standard of business ethics, one fears, which is low compared with the standards of American efficiency, ingenuity, and enterprise. "The people of our country," said the Sioux City (Iowa) *Unionist,* "have got to be honest or America is all washed up."



9 *Trade Reactions*

I READ YOUR ARTICLE in the *Reader's Digest.* Very, Very Good and LOUSY.

If you would give me the honor of visiting me for about two minutes I'll ask you one question that would stop you before you could open your mouth.

A RADIO SERVICEMAN
Brooklyn, N. Y.

When first news of our survey appeared the men in the trade were quick to respond in wrath-

ful chorus. Unprecedented volumes of mail raised the cry of "false . . . misleading . . . cowardly . . . cruel . . . savage . . . Communistic." Burning with indignation, repairmen by the hundreds gave vent to their feelings via the mails. Some correspondents admit conditions exist just as described in the original story. Many have submitted thoughtful, well-written manuscripts defending the repairman. But many more confine themselves to scathing denunciation of the articles, the survey, the author, the investigators, their methods, their conclusions. Here are a few of the brickbats the men in the trade heaved at us:

Gary, Indiana. It seems impossible that any automobile repairman could escape the permanently damaging influences of your adroitly supported propaganda.

. . . Even Christ found this dishonest fraction among his disciples—and there were only twelve of them.

We know from some twenty-five years of constant business contact with automotive servicemen that they are rather heroically inclined toward kindly and conscientious service.

From the editor of a used-car magazine: Our 20,000 dealer readers greatly resent the vituperative attack and consider it without parallel the snidest, most vicious, and unfairest type of journalism.

St. Paul, Minnesota. The article is ridiculously false and unfounded. It is poorly written by a man who obviously knows very little about automobiles or service. I demand a full retraction at once.

Norfolk, Virginia. Just as scurrilous as it can be. I wonder if there is not some propaganda purpose behind this article to destroy public confidence in the largest industry.

New York City. The Riis investigators went about with fraudulent intent and an attitude that rendered their whole galloping polling escapade utterly worthless, just a piece of dirt.

Outremont, Quebec. We are trying to do our best to stop delivery of your magazine in the province of Quebec, because you seem to be a bunch of liars worse than all the garages that you said you contacted.

. . . Your John Patric and Lioy May were unable to make deductions on anything. They merely took

information but never traveled the mileage you state, and therefore I call you lousy liars trying to educate people on something you do not know yourself.

The mass tirade continues in such terms: "infamous . . . conceived in iniquity and born in sin . . . vicious . . . amateurish resort to cheap trickery . . . apparently deliberate misstatement of facts . . . idle, unfounded statements of some literary Quisling . . . horse thief. . . ."

Some men in the trade temper their blasts with a more coherent defense of the repairman:

Bradford, New Hampshire. Everyone wants his car about ten minutes before it gets to the shop. Some of the jobs have been "stinkers." The mechanic has skinned his knuckles, burned his arms, smacked his head on something, and everything in general seems to be going wrong. Do you assume that the mechanics can always think straight after having been through such a session? Hell! I've pulled some boners that were pips, and I blush when I think of them, but the customers have also pulled some beauts. Your investigators were dishonestly trying to find dishonest repairmen and apparently found what they were seeking, or did they? Perhaps the mechanics were not all being dishonest deliberately.

One Kalamazoo, Michigan, car dealer writes that our article has brought him "some nice business," but that at the same time he is "a little peeved."

I could write an article longer than yours telling how the public try to gyp me and how they have gypped me. I can tell you where preachers have lied about the appraisals of their cars. I can show you many cases where the public will get an appraisal on their car and then go home and remove and exchange equipment. But what business in the U.S.A. has rendered more free service than garage and service stations? Who pays for all this free air, water, battery service, clean toilets, information, taxi service, call for and deliver work, and all the free checking, estimates, prices, etc., that the garageman renders?

Vancouver, British Columbia. Our hats are off to those artful, suave, and cynical investigators who have so cleverly tricked some 63 per cent of the country's comparatively poorest paid, skilled tradesmen into a dishonest admission.

. . . The modern motorist, who kills 34,000 people each year, sends triple that many to the hospitals, does hundreds of thousands of dollars of dam-

age, who curses every policeman who watches him, expects every poor sucker who lifts his hood, fills his battery, airs his tires, wipes his windshield, and a dozen other so-called free services, to say, "Dat's all right, I just can't make no charge. I am an honest mechanic; I live on hot air."

Mr. Milton Benz, of Rochester, New York, expands upon this same theme of the customer being the gyp in an eloquent defense of the garageman:

. . . The American driver, in my experience, considers chiseling the serviceman in the same category as keeping fouled baseballs. He will misrepresent the condition of his car, demand as much extra service as the traffic will bear, and after an estimate is made will try to lump in a few more bits of work for the same price. He wants his battery checked, his ignition checked, his front end checked, his joints, transmission, clutch, and differential checked, rattles sought out, tagged, and enumerated, all for free.

. . . He considers a garage mid-Victorian if it isn't equipped with one of these so-called Rube Goldberg affairs. He expects the owner to provide grindstones, electric drills, tools, fifty-ton presses, brake

machines, lathes, hydraulic jacks, and free advice. Sometimes he even expects to work on his own car in the service station. If he is charged two dollars for a fifteen-minute operation, he is outraged, ignoring the fact that the operation might involve several hundred dollars' worth of tools and machinery.

Let us examine this creature further. He demands that he be told exactly what a clutch job will cost. That leaves two alternatives: The serviceman can quote the maximum cost of replacement to include a new pressure plate, throwout bearing, driven plate, and clutch pilot bearing. This usually covers the serviceman but loses the customer, due to apoplexy. Or else he can quote the average cost and hope to hell he comes out on top.

Let us assume that we have put in a clutch and the customer sourly admits that it is all right. The next day he returns and demands to know what we did to it to break his rear spring. We mildly assure him that we did nothing to it. Well, we must have dropped it down too hard and broken it. We convince him that it was not possible to do this, and he grudgingly allows us to repair it but suggests that we ought to do it for half price. We, with fine patience, refuse and are classed with Hitler.

The gyp customer will do his best to get you

wittingly or unwittingly to condemn the work of another garageman who may be your best friend and the best mechanic alive. If you do this, he runs over two dogs and a cat getting the knock back to the aforementioned best friend and mechanic. If you say that the job needed a special gauge, jig, or tool, the story is translated to wit: "You haven't the equipment either mentally or physically to repair a roller skate, and your friend down the line says so and you're a crook to boot." It takes us six months to get our best friend back to the point where he will buy a gasket from us if he can't get one somewhere else.

Altogether it is a matter of dog eat dog with the customer taking the first bite and getting the bigger bites. I can prove that by statistics. More garagemen starve to death than customers.

Our investigation of repairmen was naturally based upon the premise that all men are honest; that was why the results of the survey make such startling news, both for us and for the public. But many letter-writers take us to task for the emphasis we put on the dishonesty which the investigations uncovered. Says one correspondent: "Considering all the facts, I don't think your

investigator should complain that three fifths of all mechanics are dishonest. Rather, he should exclaim, 'Thank God, two fifths of all mechanics are honest!' "

In the face of critical comment such as that described in the previous pages it is surprising indeed to find that there are many men in the trade who not only have refrained from attacking our findings but readily admit that conditions are just about that bad. Says one in DeQueen, Arkansas: "I know just how true this article is, being a garageman myself." From another, in Earlville, Illinois: "We'd like every one of our customers to read the article." From another in Santa Fe, New Mexico: "I am a second generation auto repairman. I'm not upset by your findings. They will make things tough for the honest repairman for a while but in the long run he will benefit. More power to you!"

A Chicago watchmaker writes as follows: "The story on watch repairmen is most interesting. Mr. Riis's poll of watchmakers reveals a condition which needs airing. I would say that he understates the case."

Shortly after the appearance of the first repair-

man story, a number of garagemen in one region were questioned; of seventy-eight who had a definite opinion, sixty-seven agreed with the substance of the article.

Additional evidence pours in from men in the trade who have seen gyppery done. Some confess having done it themselves—in moderation. "The most I'd ever try to overcharge," says one, "would be $4.00 or $5.00—none of this $23 the investigators found."

The manager of a filling station in Bennington, Vermont, remarks: "I worked in a New York City station to get the latest ideas on service but soon came home. If I tried up here the stunts they pull in New York, my customers would shoot me."

Says a shop owner in Athol, Massachusetts: "In a big garage where I used to work we had a fellow who, when a car came in with engine trouble, always put on a new coil first thing. Got to be a joke. When a car drove in and this guy began working on it we'd yell to the parts man: 'Get out another coil!' I don't know how many hundred coils that fellow sold to people who didn't need them."

That the authors have attempted to make the tone of their stories a constructive one was recognized by many repairmen. A Sioux City, Iowa, auto dealer writes that in his opinion the article underestimated the percentage of dishonest garagemen, saying: "The activities of these unscrupulous operators should be curtailed, and the more publicity given to this condition the harder it would be for them to apply their shady practices. I am writing this letter to congratulate you."

A letter from Hagarstown, Indiana, says: "We have certainly never doubted the results of your survey. We think it quite timely and one that will provoke much constructive thinking among not only car owners but dealers throughout the country. I notice that a number of the trade papers are up in arms over the article and are condemning your methods in a most ridiculous manner."

Says a Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, garageman: "The exposé should have a salutary effect on every garage operator."

A garage manager in Onawa, Iowa, reacted promptly to our findings. "At my next personnel meeting I am reading aloud the article in the

July issue of the *Digest* and presenting each of my employees with a check, hoping that this will help them to realize that the public respects an honest workman."

Critics in the trade have swarmed all over the authors' original statements concerning the adaptability of Rube Goldberg machines for crooked dealing. Typical comments: "The modern automobile or radio cannot be serviced without these scientific, fact-finding tools. As necessary to mechanics as X ray to medicine." But even manufacturers carefully temper their defense with admissions that some of this equipment is not what it should be; and in dishonest hands *any of it* can be used to gyp the customer. Says a Chicago manufacturer of legitimate service machines:

We realize that along with the manufacture of Rube Goldberg equipment there have been devices placed on the market which were far from perfect and also that some of this equipment has been used by unscrupulous operators to gyp the customers, but we realize also that although not entirely free from blame, repairmen in general have no monopoly on dishonesty.

Many mechanics agree that "the public has been led to demand Rube Goldbergs; it thinks we're old-fashioned without them. *Some of the testing devices are necessary, but the fancy cabinets are not.*" Conclusion: If Rube Goldbergs are good diagnosticians, they are also super-salesmen, and only as helpful, efficient, and honest as the men who operate them.

The survey method which our investigators used has been bitterly attacked by the repairmen. "A baited trap," one serviceman calls it. "Few mechanics know the Lincoln Zephyr; thus the findings are distorted," says a Detroit dealer, and others join him in objecting to the use of "a car with which repairmen are least familiar." But we found that the "inexperienced" rural mechanics usually spotted the trouble instantly and made no charge; the mechanics of swanky Miami and Hollywood, where the Zephyr is commoner, were the ones who failed to pass the test. Indeed some repairmen take just the opposite view: that the test was *too* simple. One Council Bluffs (Iowa) garageman thinks that the survey was "very unfair" but says: "You run around the country with a trouble *so simple* to locate that

colored car washers, shade-tree mechanics, or anyone could not help but find it. . . ."

Throughout there is a human tendency to blame the other fellow. Usually the independent repairmen blame the large concerns: "They've got to pay for that overhead somehow." The big dealers say, "Look out for the independents, they're all fly-by-nights." Here is sad testimony from the trade: a garageman in Hoboken, New Jersey: "Mechanics haven't been making anything for several years, so now they're trying to get what they think is coming to them."

An Illinois radioman: "The radio mechanic is more often underpaid than any other type of skilled laborer. No one will pay a large sum to fix an inexpensive radio. Hence every job must bring in some money or the serviceman will cease to exist. Even a loose wire should be charged for (at a reasonable minimum charge)."

An Albany, New York, repairman says: "Most of us garages feel that we've got to try to sell the customer everything we can get him to buy."

A Massachusetts mechanic, describing a large shop he has just left: "We had a helluva over-

head. We had quotas to make on oil and lube jobs. In the shop we had to turn out a certain dollar volume every week. And so if we were low and it was easy to slip an extra coil on the bill, we did it."

We agreed that repairmen have a point when they say that their time and the benefit of their experience are valuable and worth something in even the smallest cases. But they are worth something only when the repairman tells the truth and the whole truth. And if these reactions of the trade prove nothing else, they prove that the customer, too, must treat his repairman as squarely as he expects to be treated himself. Here's what a small garage owner in Michigan has to say on that subject:

. . . Then there was the first snowfall. I am not poetic, but I always remember the first snowfall. We have one every year. You pull cars out from 10 P.M. until 7 A.M. They are always just off the road. I have never found a motorist who honestly admitted that he needed a wrecker. There may be but three inches of windshield showing above the mud, but all he needs is a little push. They didn't expect any trouble, so they didn't bring any money. However, they have

a cousin in Sandusky who knows my uncle in Pewamo, so they're sure you won't mind. Watch out, little garageman, the average motorist will gyp you if you don't watch out!

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10 *Magazine Excerpts*

From *Motor Age*

. . . A savage, cruel, skimpily supported attack on the entire automobile service and repair trade of the United States. It is a verbal blitzkreig with no more than Hitlerian justification. In fact, to vindicate his depredations, Hitler has sometimes offered pseudo-reasoning which sounded more logical than that offered to give seeming substance to this sad attempt at sensationalism.

. . . The false impression is created that a large

majority of those in the service business are not much if any better than thieves and robbers. To put it more mildly, their moral sense is warped. Their ethical standards are as low as the ankles of a flat-footed mole.

. . . The male investigator and his female secretary had a trick which they played. They baited a trap in which to catch their prey. They made a dishonest approach in their search for the honest serviceman. Or were they, in reality, assiduously seeking out the few dishonest ones to prove a previously made assumption? Diogenes with his lighted lantern was not a member of their party.

Before pulling up at a service station they slyly and surreptitiously detached a wire from one of the coils. The male investigator got out and hid or ran away and left his female secretary to drive the limping automobile up to the haven of unholy hope and expectation, pretending that she didn't know what was the matter with the car. The lady's written reports of what followed give reason to believe that some, at least, of those who are charged with dishonesty got a preliminary whiff of an aromatic rat and decided to turn the would-be crook catcher into a landed sucker. How else can we account for such a diagnosis as, "Lady, your manifold is gone"?

. . . The total number of possible calls in such an investigation is, therefore, more than 100,000. The *Reader's Digest* investigators called on and "tested" 347 out of a possible 100,000 plus, or about three tenths of one per cent and then applied their scanty, knotty, worm-eaten stuff to the building of an ill-shaped and shaky conclusion. . . .

From Consumers Union Reports, October 1941.

. . . Persons familiar with the operation and servicing of radios have been aware of the frauds involved in radio repairing for some time; the general public has only suspected them. Now that the facts are out, various radio-service magazines are busily offering apologies on one hand and inventing flaws in the investigators' methods on the other.

Consumers need have no doubts, however, that the facts and implications of the *Reader's Digest* article are substantially correct. The investigators seem justified in concluding that you run most chance of getting gypped in large cities and are most likely to get a fair deal in small towns where the serviceman must be more careful of his reputation.

The answer to the question: "Why is there so much deception and gypping in radio repairing?"

is certainly, in part, that there are too many servicemen for the market to support. Requirements for going into the business are simple: more or less knowledge of radios and a table to work on. The results: a terrific surplus of servicemen—both bona fide and tinkerers—and almost an economic compulsion for repairmen to overcharge on each job. Moreover, a customer will often consider that after having his set fixed once, he is entitled to free repairs if anything else goes wrong. Thus the repairman overcharges partly to cover such nuisance service calls.

From *Lehigh Valley Motor Club News,* September 1941.

FACTS SHOW MOST MOTOR SERVICEMEN HONEST

With only 218 out of over 200,000 automobile service and repairmen proved by a *Reader's Digest* survey to be dishonest the motoring public feels more confident than ever that the men who are in business to keep America in motor transportation can be trusted. The facts furnish a splendid tribute to the men engaged in a difficult business.

In its widely criticized article the *Digest* attempted to prove that, because only 129 out of 347 repairmen failed to fall for a trick, three out of five times a motorist stops for service at strange shops he will

be gypped. As *Automotive News,* mouthpiece of the auto industry, points out: this is "like picking one bad apple out of a barrel and condemning the whole barrel as being rotten."

Careful observers note that it is not necessary for motorists, even in touring, to frequent strange repair shops. Car manufacturers have their officially appointed service stations everywhere. In addition, many well-known products are nationally represented. One of the best guides is the A.A.A. emblem of the American Automobile Association, approved shops which must render efficient and honest service to over a million organized motorists. . . .

From a column in *Jobber Topics,* August 1941.

Some of the attempts at rebuttal to the Reader's Digest *blast were pathetic. Let's not kid ourselves. But so far as the public is concerned, the less said, the better. People forget quickly.* . . .

From *Automotive News,* the newspaper of the industry, July 14, 1941.

GYP STORY ROLLS ON

There's an old saying that you can't tell how far a cat will jump by the length of its tail. The same

can be said about the story that appeared in the July issue of *Reader's Digest,* which castigated automotive service shops by making a flat statement that three out of five garages were dishonest in their dealings with car owners.

Now to our desk come copies of the New York *Times,* Detroit *News,* and the Milwaukee *Journal,* all carrying rewrites of this now well-known *Gyp* story. In addition to the rewrites in the Detroit papers was a story stating that one of the Detroit City Fathers had proposed to the common council an ordinance that would legislate the crooked service station out of business.

All this because one writer called on 347 garages scattered from coast to coast and found that only 169 [*Our figure was 129—the authors.*] diagnosed his trouble correctly. An entire industry with over 200,000 service outlets is being crucified in public print because of the experiences collected in 347 calls.

Dealers are yelling for somebody to prove this story a fake.

Who has bona fide figures to show if the percentage of garages claimed do or do not overcharge their customers? We know that we don't have them, nor do the car manufacturers have them. We doubt

very much if anyone could possibly get accurate figures to show if and how much deliberate dishonesty was running rampant in the service field.

Nor do we feel that it would be possible to find how much unintentional dishonesty was practiced because service managers and mechanics diagnosed trouble wrongly.

We do know, however, that hundreds of dealers do not provide their service managers with sufficient incentive to increase the dealer's service-customer following; we know that other hundreds seldom, if ever, check on the operation of their service department to see if it is giving efficient service and is manned by mechanics who are experienced and actually know their business.

The cat has jumped—its tail was short but evidently has fanned a smoldering fire. Maybe the printing of this *Gyp* story, while it may destroy the confidence that thousands of owners might have had in the honesty and fair dealing of their service source, will in the long run have a very beneficial effect upon dealer service by causing hundreds or thousands of dealers to check up on the type of service their shop is rendering and see if they are *unwittingly* overcharging or cheating their best customers—owners of the cars they sell.

11 *Aftermaths*

THE AMERICAN AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY is perhaps the ablest single industry in the country, an industry packed with keen, intelligent men. So it is strange that their reaction to the serious statements we made about them was so uncomprehending.

Those mechanics we talked to admitted, in conversation, that we were quite right, or, rather, 86 per cent of them did. But of all the hostile re-

actions we found only half a dozen really intelligent ones, and of those, two stand out, one from a car manufacturer, one from a trade magazine.

Only one motorcar manufacturer sent his representative to discuss the situation with us. Several others wrote commendatory letters or broadcast among their dealers reprints of the magazine article. But just the single manufacturer thought it well to dig further into the subject as it affected his own large national network of dealers. His public-relations man came to New York, from Detroit, to inquire whether our research tour had visited any of his company's local dealers, and, if so, what the results had been. It is perhaps a commentary on this company's attitude that, on going over the reports, we found we had covered a few of his dealers, and that they had all measured up to the best in the field.

The representative of one big oil company invited us to his motor proving station to witness the most gigantic of all Rube Goldbergs in action. We accepted the invitation and had our own old car tested on his machine. The situation was hardly covered by our original statements about the Goldberg machines, because this one

was not being used to merchandise repair work, it was being used purely as a good-will proposition to influence motorists to use a special brand of gas. There was no possibility of gypping the public even if the operators of the machine had wanted to, which they palpably did not.

And one single trade magazine came to see us and investigate us. Therein lies matter for real wonder, that the press of America's most alert industry was so markedly not alert itself. As a point of fact, the job that we did should have been done long before by a trade magazine. Instead, however, these magazines contented themselves with sundry forms of denial of our statements and abuse of us.

The single editor who called upon us said that he wanted to see what kind of people we were and photograph us so that he could show his readers what kind of people we looked like. Well and good. In his commentary on our charges he went as far toward reason and intelligent discussion as he could. But even he refused point-blank to photograph our impressive table covered with parts improperly or allegedly removed from our test car. He gave no reason for his refusal, but the

fact is that a photograph of that table is damaging factual evidence in our favor.

One leading motor magazine—the only one which refused permission to reprint its comment—went through astonishing contortions to prove our survey all wrong.

The editor related how, a year previously, he had installed in his own car a badly burned valve and had taken that car to fourteen garages for diagnosis. The valve, which he keeps in his desk, was badly burned so that it needed replacement. Yet, he said, not a single one of those garages made any effort to sell him the valve job that his car really required. When Riis suggested to him that this was strange evidence of the competence of those garages, he replied that it showed they were too honest, so honest they didn't even sell the customer what they should sell him.

One of the strange statements made by these editors ran to this effect: "It was instantly obvious to the mechanics you tested that they were being tested. They spotted the unusual job as a test proposition and therefore, naturally, they set out to rook you. That follows irresistibly." Maybe it does, though it is wholly beyond nor-

mal comprehension; does a man always, inevitably, lie and cheat when he knows he is being tested?

This magazine collected itself for a blast against our original article and emitted it in the form of a large, boxed offer of $1,000 reward, apparently for proof of the truth of our article. It left the intended impression that the magazine would pay anyone $1,000 who could prove that Messrs. Patric and Riis hadn't lied.

When we wrote the editor, asking for details and specifications so that we could attempt to win that thousand dollars, the editor replied that he was pretty busy with the next issue.

How much more intelligent was the act of the authorized dealers in several cities like San Francisco and Hartford, in uniting in full-page newspaper advertisements reading like this:

> YES, READER'S DIGEST, WE HAVE READ YOUR ARTICLE THAT IN SAN FRANCISCO "GYPS" PREDOMINATE 62 TO 20. . . . MR. AUTO OWNER, THAT'S WHY YOU SHOULD TAKE YOUR CAR *HOME* FOR SERVICE TO YOUR RESPONSIBLE DEALER.

If ever the motorcar owner had good reason to look for authorized dealer service, authorized parts, in the care of his proudly possessed automobile, the *Reader's Digest* has pointed out How and Why!

In one of the most widely talked of articles written about the service trades in years there is mentioned among other things that in San Francisco "the gyps predominate 62 to 20."

It is a source of pride to every one of us motorcar dealers and distributors who sign this statement that "no new car-dealer service departments were mentioned as such."

Be assured that we guarantee you, at all times:

1. Expert diagnosis of any of your car troubles.
2. Expert mechanical work.
3. Authorized replacement parts.
4. Minimum and predetermined costs.
5. A square deal.

Part of your obligations in the nation's defense program is to drive safely. To fulfill that obligation, keep your car in safe running condition. Come to us for the service work you and your car need.

WE ARE DETERMINED THAT YOU SHALL RECEIVE A SQUARE DEAL

There follows a list of fifteen participating auto dealers.

Radio Today was the only radio publication, so far as we could see, which took the attitude: These charges are pretty severe, probably too severe, but what is there we can do about them, how can we improve conditions within our industry? We quote from this magazine's editorial comment:

. . . Out of the survey conducted by the *Reader's Digest,* however, come some excellent lessons for responsible servicemen in methods of dealing with customers, so that any appearance of unethical conduct may be avoided in the minds of laymen. Customers do not understand the complicated processes through which servicemen arrive at their diagnosis and so are likely to misunderstand even the most intelligent safeguarding of the customer's interests.

An unforgivable fault reported from some servicemen in the *Reader's Digest* survey was that of charging for parts not actually put into the sets, or for services not rendered. Certainly there is no excuse for methods of this kind and no necessity. Above all, it isn't necessary to pad the bill with phony charges if the serviceman will explain the just and reasonable charges that should be made for the work he has done.

. . . To sum up the whole situation, do an honest job, sell the things that are needed, and get a fair price for your work. Your weapons against the charge of being a "gyp" are these:

1. Your reputation as a local businessman.
2. Your membership in a local service organization which guarantees the work of its members.
3. Your methods of doing business—itemized bills, guaranteed workmanship, etc.

It would be foolish to state that there are no "chiselers" in radio or any other particular business. However, *Radio Today* feels certain that the percentage in the radio service field is very, very much less than the percentage arrived at in the article under discussion.

One of the constant statements thrown back at us was this: "Ah, but there are 200,000 service stations, and you tested only a few hundred; that's far too small a percentage." Maybe so; but there are seventy-two radio and trade publications in the United States, and we can test *all* of them by their response to these articles. In our opinion only three of them, or 4 per cent, reacted intelligently. Angry recrimination is not an intelligent answer.

The watch trade was less embittered, more receptive, so far as its press revealed.

From the *Hamilton Traveler,* November 1941.

Well—it finally happened.

Along with its exposure of "gyppery" in automobile and radio repair service the *Reader's Digest* finally got around to the watchmaker in its September issue. Of several hundred watchmakers investigated, it was found that 49 out of 100 sought to take advantage of the customer's lack of watch knowledge by overcharging him or by doing a lot of unnecessary work. The fact that this compares with a total of 63 "gyps" out of every 100 automobile repairmen investigated, and with 64 out of every 100 radio technicians, is small consolation.

A study of all three *Reader's Digest* articles, however, would seem to indicate something more than outright dishonesty on the part of many of the repairmen involved. It indicates that many of them fell back on dishonest excuses simply because they were poor businessmen and didn't have the ability to charge the customer what they thought the job was really worth. Instead of making the minor adjustments which were asked for by the *Digest* investigators, then charging a minimum fee to which

they were entitled, they lied to the customer. . . . Just as there is no excuse for "gyppery," so there is no excuse for pussyfooting on the matter of fair repair prices.

. . . Actually, the *Reader's Digest* is to be congratulated upon its investigation. No honest watchmaker has the slightest reason to be upset about it.

Watches still need service. People aren't going to quit patronizing watchmakers because of this or any other article. They're simply going to be more particular where they go.

Any way you look at it, this is a real break for the square shooter who does good work at fair prices and who knows how to merchandise his facilities to the public in a way that gains their confidence.

From the *Jewelers' Circular-Keystone,* September 1941.

. . . If the editors expected us to rush to the defense of the entire watch-repairing craft with a claim that practically every watchmaker is a high-grade reputable craftsman whose integrity and ability are above reproach, in the way that radio and automotive papers took up the cudgels when the *Reader's Digest* published similar reports covering

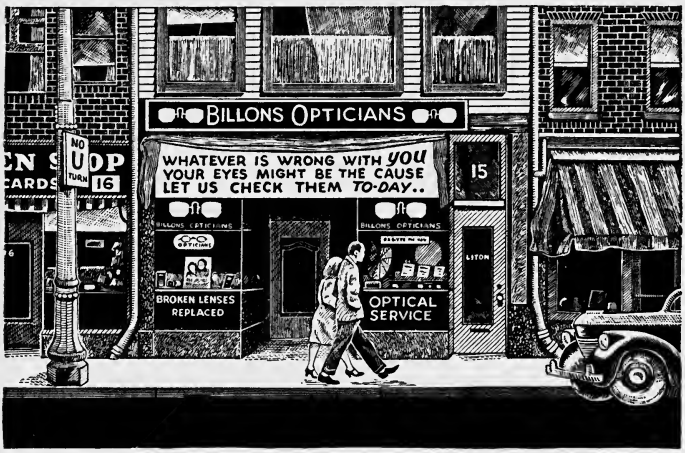
those fields, they are going to be greatly surprised. We heartily subscribe to the general conclusion set forth and only regret that the article didn't give a little more information as to the details of conducting the investigation and a little better advice on how to detect and avoid the gyp.

No one who has the least acquaintance with the watch-repair field will deny that it is infested with a substantial number of repairmen who are either dishonest or incompetent, or both.

. . . No one is more keenly aware of, or more eager to improve, the deplorable conditions in the watch-repair business than the watchmakers themselves. That they have not had greater success is no fault of theirs. In state after state watchmakers' associations have striven for legislation that would require examination and licensing, and in state after state, with the exception of Wisconsin, Indiana, and Oregon, have the public's legislators turned a deaf or hostile ear.

. . . If the *Reader's Digest* article helps, as we hope it will, to awaken the public to the need for regulation and enlists public support of the drive for examination and licensing, the fraternity of honorable watchmakers will owe them a sincere vote of thanks.

12 *Doctors and Lawyers*



IN THE IMMENSE FLOOD of correspondence which poured into Pleasantville after publication of the garage repairman story one idea recurred so many times that it deserves comment. That idea was, in essence:

"Why pick on us mechanics? There are crooks in every line of business. Why not take the lawyers, but especially why not the doctors? Doctors must be crooks or they would not have to conceal their prescriptions in Latin."

The repeated reference to doctors is certainly evidence of a prevailing feeling in the American people that our doctors are not all they should be. That is possible; but neither are authors, or even publishers. Aside from the merit or demerit of the charge against doctors there is one excellent reason why no similar survey of the medical ranks can be made.

The first essential in this type of investigation is to present a clear-cut, neat problem to the group being investigated. It is much like examining a class in school. If it is mathematics, you ask the members of the class specific mathematical questions, as, for example: "How much is eleven times eleven?" Only one answer is correct. If it is history, you ask mostly questions capable of definite answers, such as the date of the Punic Wars, or the course of events leading to the Treaty of Ghent.

We were at great pains to evolve that type of clear-cut problem to present to the repairmen in each field. We found early in the job that we could not take a car to a garage and say, "What do you recommend doing to this car?" We had to offer them a simple, compact, open-and-shut

problem, and that is what we did when we took to them the car with the wire off the coil. That is what we did with the radio and its loose tube and the typewriter with its unhooked carriage or loosened platen, and the watch with its loosened screw.

But you can hardly do that in the medical field. There is too much legitimate room for differing interpretations of human ailments and different diagnoses and prescriptions. It is not easy to find an absolute for the investigators to fall back on. Suppose I go to ten doctors and say that I have a pain in my stomach; I could not blame the ten for ten different prescriptions. Maybe, even if I have no stomach pain, I do need the rest or the laxative or the changed diet they might invariably prescribe. There might emerge interesting facts as to the fees charged, but they are facts which we all know now.

Four years ago Riis touched on the medical field in an investigation of optometry throughout the United States. It happened that a member of his family had an ulcer on the eye, and in her anxiety and trouble she was consulting medical eye specialists up and down the East coast. At

that moment Riis saw a big painted sign in the window of an optometrist's store reading to the effect that whatever was wrong with you, your eyes might be the cause, and spectacles might cure it. It struck him as strange that when the nation's greatest specialists were struggling over a problem the proprietor of a street-front store had so glib an answer.

So he sent a cavalcade throughout the United States, having their eyes tested in optometric shops of all kinds. The work inevitably brought him in touch with the medical men too; and while the results convinced him that the optometrists had much to regret, they also convinced this writer that the medical men were at fault in staying contentedly in their ivory towers and not crusading for better health services. Yes, the doctors have faults.

A voracious investigator, eager for punishment, might survey the different fields of medicine by devising some mild ailment and taking it to a hundred M.D.s, a hundred osteopathic physicians, a hundred allopaths, homeopaths, mental healers, and what have you. There is no reason to believe that, if he were still healthy at

the conclusion of his research, he would have any more knowledge than we all now have. There are good doctors and bad doctors in all types of healing, but you can never "expose" them by statistics. By and large, I believe they do as well as they can as idealistically as they can, with much more conscience than our friends in the garages.

Because of the necessity in these days for all of us to make our old household machines function a year or two longer than usual, we confined our survey to the repairmen of various industries. Doctors are not really repairmen, except in the broad sense intended by a clergyman who asked Riis to come and lecture to his church on the question: "Do the ministers, as spiritual repairmen, gyp their customers by dishonest soul repair?" Neither are lawyers to be classed as repairmen. A survey of the type of lawyers who frequent the municipal courts of our big cities would, probably, if properly "tested," reveal markedly anti-civic practices, but how are you going to test them? It is worth speculating about. This writer has sat on many juries and wasted time on trivial cases which should never have

come to court at all, and only did come to court because two sets of second-rate lawyers were happily opposing each other and profiting by the opposition. But how to investigate them? One could hardly devise an imaginary case and take it to lawyers for their handling.

Mention is made here of the doctors and the lawyers simply because the garagemen, in their counterfire, aimed so many shots in the direction of those two professions. To repairmen who attempted to cover their retreat by that tactic we replied that they might be right, but that it is no defense of the repairmen to say that other callings contained dishonest practitioners too. If I am hauled into court charged with assault and battery, it is not a successful defense for me to say "Yes, but look at Mr. Z., he killed a man." It would be, in fact, an admission of my guilt in the charge of assault and battery. So, with the garagemen, their attempt to pass the charge along to the doctors and lawyers was an actual admission of their own guilt as mechanics.

13 *Conclusion*

AT THIS POINT we may be permitted a little general theorizing. Unquestionably the repairmen we tested showed a large amount of either dishonesty or incompetence. The investigators' odyssey yielded a total of 1,374 clear-cut tests; in only 601 of these did the repairmen come through with a clean slate. Why should there be *any* dishonesty or incompetence in these businesses?

Two facts emerge. The men who cheated did

so because of economic pressure. Either they are underpaid, as mechanics, or they labor under high costs and heavy taxes, as owners. Secondly, the investigators were strangers to them. Often obviously strangers in the community, and the stranger has been from time immemorial fair game.

That factor is important. Dishonesty prevailed in the big cities for the same reason, which basically is the element of anonymity. If the other man doesn't know you, and if you don't know him, and you never expect to meet again, you are more inclined to cheat him than if he is a neighbor. Immigrants to the United States long illustrated the same truth: until they settled in communities and obtained identities, crime was much more common among them.

Wrote Harold Bell Wright to John Patric:

. . . We all know that the deplorable state of business ethics disclosed is by no means confined to the repairing of automobiles, radios, watches, etc. The condition revealed by your investigation is no more than the small pimple which sometimes evidences the presence of a deadly cancer.

. . . The appalling thing about it all is that

ninety-nine out of a hundred readers of your factual demonstration will say "of course, we know it, but business is business." The common belief is that only fools and credulous idealists these days believe in the possibility of honest ways of living. The appalling thing, I say, is that these dishonesties are so universally applauded as good business and smart politics.

I still believe that the instinct peculiar to man which incites him to brotherly love and kindness, to honor and honesty, to justice and sacrifice, to loyalty and integrity, to idealism and faith, will eventually lift the race out of this muck of materialism.

Critics of this survey have suggested that the revelations indicate a general American trend toward petty swindling, a habit much more common in older countries where economic pressure has been much more severe. It would be unfortunate if this were true; but it is not too late by any means to head off any such trend. Fifty years ago and less dishonesty in the United States was more or less a natural characteristic of great corporations. Public opinion corrected that; public opinion can correct any modern trend toward crookedness on the part of little business.

Public opinion, after all, is reputation, and reputation is precisely the opposite of the anonymity which fosters cheating.

Confidence in public opinion is the factor which directly refutes the charge that Americans are increasingly dishonest. Public opinion was notably shocked by the articles on repairmen; it was shocked because public opinion is set against "smart" practices in business. The nation which retains so alert and vigorous a public opinion is, by desire and intent, an honest nation.

In that direction lies the only sound corrective for the cheating our investigators unearthed. Laws will not do it; laws never make men honest. But the prestige of honesty, the jealous pride of good reputation will do it. All men covet being known as honorable men; therefore the more publicity the subject gets, the better. Hence the articles, hence this book. An open public attitude encourages honesty and discourages crookedness.

Responsible repairmen in any community can undertake to correct their own evils. No outsiders can do it nearly so well. Too, the great national manufacturers should think carefully

about organized effort in the same direction. The manufacturer, throughout these surveys, appears as a solid, reliable, and very important factor. He is conspicuous; that is, he has no anonymity, he has a reputation. He has every motive to deliver good products and to encourage the best of service for them. He can well ponder closer relations with his field representative.

But more powerful than reason, more effective than pleading, is pride, personal pride, pride in the craft. The repairman today is a technician; how can he help being proud of his standing?

First and last drawings in a Sunday page by Webster. Although, in this case, *The Timid Soul* found a truthful mechanic, Caspar Milquetoast admitted in a letter to the authors that "often I'm not so fortunate."

Why is *Repairmen May Gyp You* in an "author's edition"? Here are some of the reasons: comments taken from letters of readers of *Yankee Hobo in the Orient,* which to date has sold nearly twice as many copies in its author's editions as it did in all the five editions that were published by Doubleday

"I always thought *I* was a freedom-loving man, but never realized how little I really knew about freedom until I read your magnificent book. You tell it so simply! How I wish every man and woman in the whole world could read *Yankee Hobo in the Orient.* We'll cherish our copy always." —Joe Shirlow, service station, Oakland, New Jersey

"Parts of it are sheer delight, and all of it is absorbing."—Helen Hironimus, warden, Women's Federal Penitentiary Alderson, West Va.

"Mother wrote me about your book. I want a copy for my son. Here's a check written on a scrap of wrapping paper—all I have in the jungle. It'll be good."—Major Perley Lewis, somewhere in Burma

"Your own new edition of *Yankee Hobo in the Orient* is superior in every way to the Doubleday editions. Herewith check, and the names of ten friends to whom I want the book sent as gifts." —Ed Hill

"Turned the last page as reluctantly as I close Lin Yu Tang and Thomas Wolfe." —Sara Dorris Hodson, Harrisburg, Illinois

"Bob brought *Yankee Hobo in the Orient* home and stood in the kitchen reading it aloud while I got supper. I was so interested that I let the applesauce burn. We were having guests; Bob had to go and buy a bakery pie. I'm pretty busy raising five youngsters, but I enjoyed every word in your fine book." —Mary Williamson, Austin Texas

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"Many of us here at the office—and at home, my wife—have liked *Yankee Hobo in the Orient.* Most interested in how you got along on so little money. I enjoyed the tale of the White Russian beauty." —Wheeler Sammons, Jr., associate publisher, *Who's Who in America*

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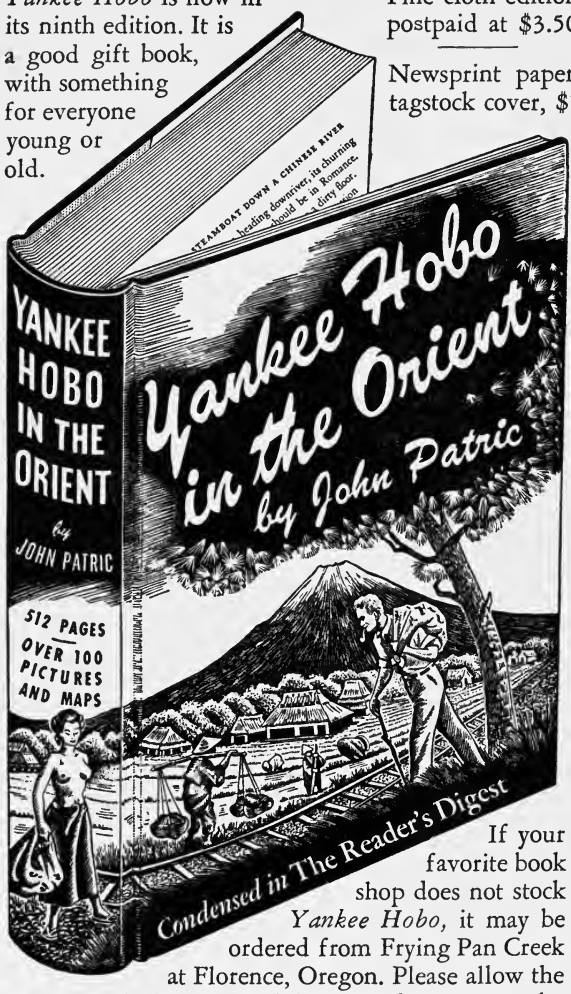

If your favorite book shop does not stock *Yankee Hobo,* it may be ordered from Frying Pan Creek at Florence, Oregon. Please allow the author a little time to fill your order. He may be up the Creek fishing, off on another hobo trip, or back in New York getting out a new edition. In such cases the order would have to be forwarded.


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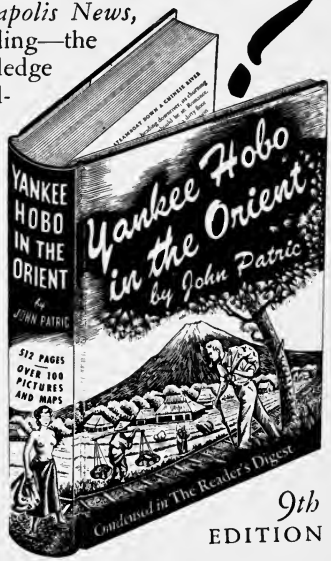

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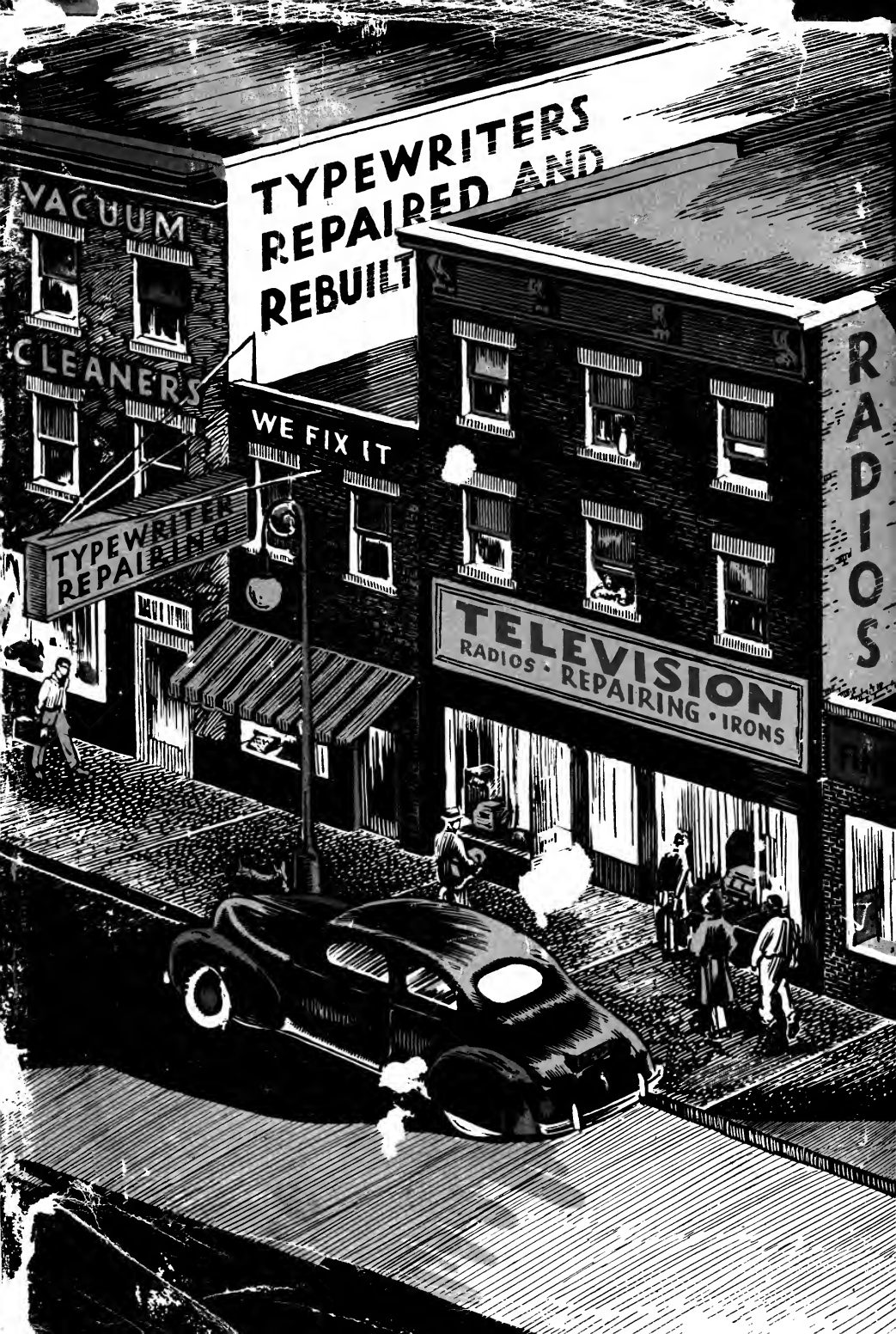
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